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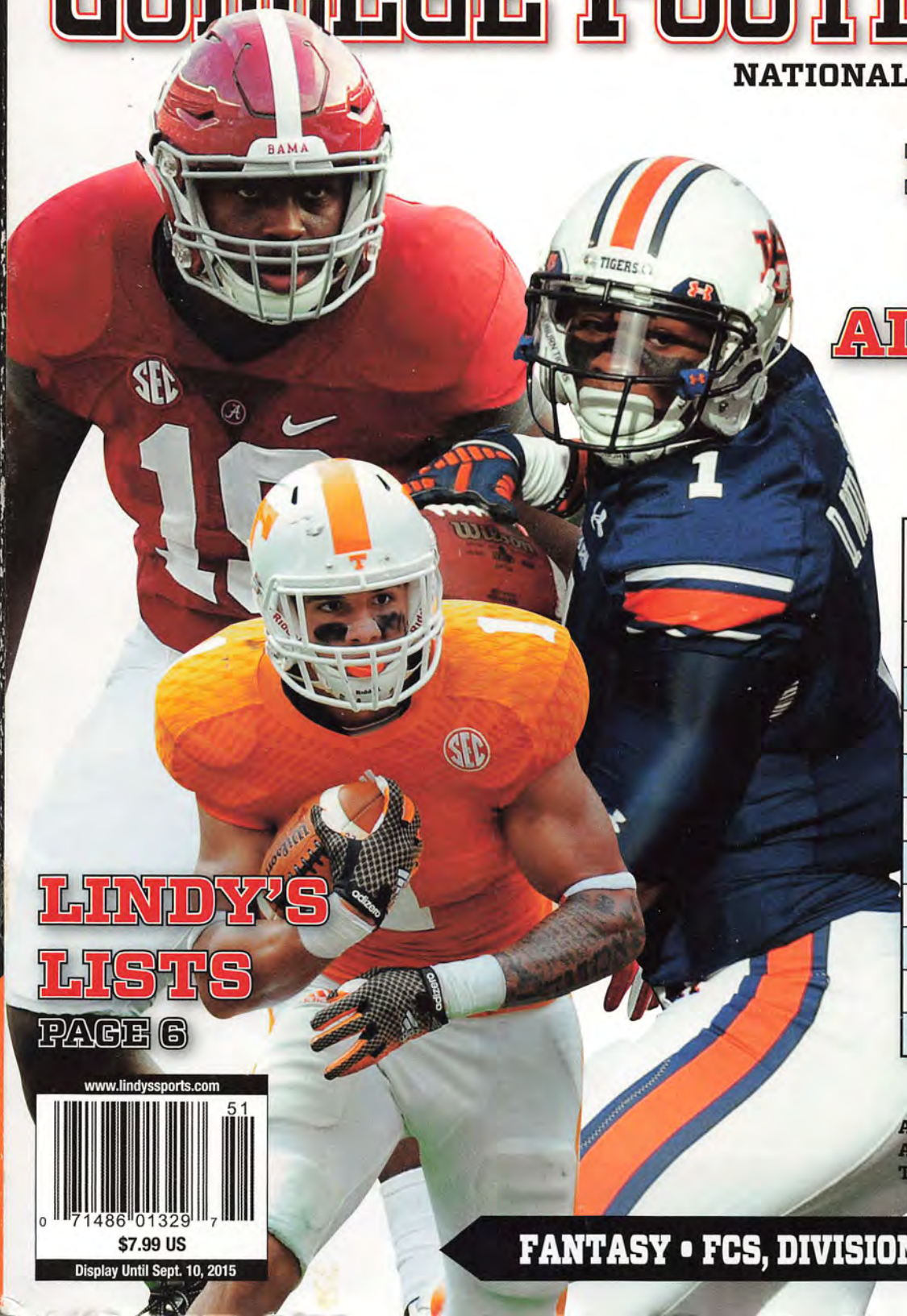
AMERICA'S LEADING FOOTBALL AUTHORITY

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

NATIONAL 2015 PREVIEW



LINDY'S RANKS ALL 128 TEAMS

LINDY'S TOP 10
1. OHIO STATE
2. TCU
3. ALABAMA
4. OREGON
5. BAYLOR
6. MICHIGAN STATE
7. NOTRE DAME
8. AUBURN
9. CLEMSON
10. GEORGIA

LINDY'S LISTS

PAGE 6

ALABAMA - Reggie Ragland
AUBURN - Duke Williams
TENNESSEE - Jalen Hurd

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"About the only thing I'd rather do than play basketball is hunt. There's just nothing like enjoying the great outdoors with my friends and family. Plus the challenge posed by the superior senses of your game. I grew up hunting in Louisiana, and I think it's a tradition we should pass on." **I'm The NRA.**

Karl "The Mailman" Malone
Legendary power forward for the Utah Jazz and Los Angeles Lakers, NBA's 2nd all-time scorer and Most Valuable Player '98-'99, fisherman, hunter, cattle rancher.

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Wayne LaPierre, NRA Executive Vice President

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Letter from the Publisher

Jim Harbaugh leaving the 49ers to go back to his alma mater was the top story this offseason. Dennis Dodd gives you a very in-depth look at the Michigan man in the spotlight beginning on page 10.

Can Harbaugh's new arch rival — the Ohio State Buckeyes — repeat? They enter the season as the prohibitive favorite with a lot of momentum, great coaching and possibly three quarterbacks to choose from. *Lindy's* ranks all the teams beginning on page 28.

Lindy's annual list of the best of college football is sure to entertain you beginning on page 6. We have also changed the design of our team previews and I think you will like the new look.

As always your comments and suggestions are appreciated.
Have a great season!

Sincerely,

Lindy Davis Jr.

Lindy Davis

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NUTS 'N' BOLTS:

COLLEGE FOOTBALL '15

By Dennis Dodd, Steve Greenberg, Anthony Gimino and Jon Gold

As another glorious season draws near, the random and not-so random cogitations that nag us are the pure stuff of college football.

BRET BIELEMA
Photo by Matt Strasen-USA TODAY Sports

DON'T STOP NOW

Five programs making strong moves in the right direction:

5. Tennessee: The Vols will make a huge jump in the SEC this season, which would be great for the league. Butch Jones has recruited like a champ in the early going in Knoxville, bringing all-new excitement to what had been a down-in-the-mouth program.

4. Michigan: It'll be a rapid climb for the Wolverines, who could be in the playoff picture as soon as 2017. But already we wonder: How long can a coach as tightly wound as Jim Harbaugh stay anywhere — even at his alma mater?

3. Memphis: Of course, the future is tied to Justin Fuente. Will the hot, young coach stick around awhile? If he does, this program will stay at or near the top of the AAC. This is becoming a football school — imagine that.

2. California: The offense is substantially ahead of the defense, which is no surprise given Sonny Dykes' background. The Cal offense will stay ahead of the Cal defense, but how far can it rise above (and stay above) opposing defenses? That's the question. The high-tempo Bears will score a ton in 2015 and race back into the bowl picture.

1. Arkansas: Bret Bielema is far ahead of schedule in Fayetteville. The running backs are outstanding, the offensive linemen are utterly gigantic and the defense was so much more rugged in Year 2 than it had been in Year 1. Wisconsin mold? You bet.

Breaking Bad

Five programs making scary moves in the wrong direction:

5. Virginia Tech: Three straight seasons of national irrelevance for the Hokies, but who's counting? Only everybody, as Tech is .500 in the ACC during that span. Now, the bright news: Unlike the four others on this list, we're calling for a bounce-back season. Long live "Beamer ball!"

4. South Carolina: Is the Gamecocks' run of SEC contention over? They were pretty awful last season. Steve Spurrier never loved to work all that hard, and now he's 70. He's fit as a fiddle, but is he willing to dig in like never before?

3. Northwestern: Back-to-back 5-7 seasons (combined Big Ten record: 4-12) have taken nearly all the shine off this formerly overachieving program and even called Pat Fitzgerald's once-sparkling reputation into question.

2. Iowa: Since an 11-win season in 2009, the Hawkeyes are below .500 in Big Ten play. This appears to be one of the least-talented squads Kirk Ferentz has had, too.

1. Iowa State: The Cyclones went to three bowl games in Paul Rhoads' first four seasons. Since then, they've basically become Kansas.

Quick Quiz

1. Name the country's leading returning passer.
2. Name Navy's division in the American Athletic Conference
3. Who has the nation's longest winning/losing streaks?
4. What teams threw more interceptions last year than Florida State's 20?
5. Name the number of full-time assistants who return at Oklahoma.

1. Brandon Doughty, Western Kentucky (4,830 yards); 2. West, go figure; 3. Ohio State, 13 wins in a row; Georgia State 11 losses in a row; 4. New Mexico State, 24; Fresno State, 21. 5. Three.

CARDALE JONES
Photo by Greg Bartram-USA TODAY Sports

Cardale Jones' Career In Five Tweets

5. Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play football?

4. Sooooo Last Night Wasn't A Dream. Holy Sh— (after winning Big Ten title)

3. All these hunnies hittin' up my phone right now ...

2. It was a rough decision but I think it's best for me, like to thank OSU for this amazing opportunity but my time here has came to an end ...

1. May Fools!

RANKING THE COACHES

With lots of "pretty good coaches" out there, we are charged with ranking them at the moment, and "coachin' 'em up" is a combination of career accomplishments, program building, player development, recruiting, game management, and schmoozing the alums. The most important thing, of course, is understanding that each one is most important. Suck at any of them, and you probably aren't on this list. So we end up with a fluid 22-man lineup — one for every player on the field ...

22. Todd Graham, Arizona State: He inherited an aimless program and gave 'em some aim. The result is a strong foundation. And that, boys and girls, is good coaching.

21. Dabo Swinney, Clemson: No coach in the country is more beloved by his players. He is a fascinating mix of passion, drive, and what's the word ... Relatability?

20. Charlie Strong, Texas: If he instills half as much cultural change at UT as he did at Louisville, the Longhorns will have permanent residence in playoff discussionland.

19. James Franklin, Penn State: We still can't believe what he was able to get done at Vanderbilt. With his recruiting skill and pure positivity, he's the perfect coach for the Nits.

18. Rich Rodriguez, Arizona: He's raising 'Zona to that rare air: It smells almost like heaven. But in the high desert, it needs to smell like roses.

17. Brian Kelly, Notre Dame: He's the smartest guy in the stadium (and that's not said with a smirk). On those occasions when he connects with his players, magic happens.

16. Bret Bielema, Arkansas: In his first season, the Hogs were winless in the SEC. In his second, they were good enough to muck around with anybody.

15. Bobby Petrino, Louisville: He did brilliant work at Arkansas. Now he has Louisville humming for the second time. No one is better at keeping a tough defense off balance.

14. Gary Pinkel, Missouri: Only a top-quality builder could have created and sustained such success at what used to be a basketball-only school.

13. David Shaw, Stanford: One of 13-14 Top 10-quality guys, but as the Pac-12 keeps improving all around him, will he be able to raise the Cardinal's ceiling?

12. Les Miles, LSU: Even after all these years, The Hat remains a bit rough around the edges. But no one coaches with more heart — or with more guts.

11. Steve Spurrier, South Carolina: The Visored One had a tough 2014, but he won 11 each of the three before that. At *this* USC? Mind boggling.

10. Bob Stoops, Oklahoma: Still stuck on one national title, but also still putting up double-digit victories nearly every year. There was a time when he'd have been No. 1, though.

9. Chris Petersen, Washington: The last year at Boise State was a drag. The first year at Washington was a bummer. But this is still Coach Pete we're talking about.

8. Bill Snyder, Kansas State: How many have done what this man has done — step in and repair the same broken program *twice?* We feel guilty for not showing him more respect on this list.

7. Jimbo Fisher, Florida State: He doesn't come across as the most polished CEO, but so what (see Les Miles)? This job took some real figuring out following Bobby Bowden, and he did it.

6. Mark Dantonio, Michigan State: He has the ideal temperament for the job, and his record of player development in East Lansing is as impressive as it gets.

5. Jim Harbaugh, Michigan: Sparty Nation isn't going to like this, but you know what? Jimmy Football's work with the 49ers counts, too. And he was masterful before that at Stanford.

4. Gary Patterson, TCU: He crushed it when the Horned Frogs were in C-USA and when they were in the Mountain West. Now, after a brief adjustment to the Big 12, he's crushing it again.

3. Art Briles, Baylor: What he has done at Baylor wasn't supposed to be possible (see Bill Snyder). And about that: The Bears are still improving on both sides of the ball. It's scary.

2. Urban Meyer, Ohio State: His career winning percentage (.845) is far above Nick Saban's (.754). The Nicktator leads 4-3 in national titles, but let's see who gets to five first.

1. Nick Saban, Alabama: Tough call between 1 and 2, but Saban's staying power earns him the nod. We've reached the point where losing a playoff game equals a down year for the Tide.

NICK SABAN TALKS TO WIDE RECEIVER DEIONTE THOMPSON (14)
Photo by Marvin Gentry-USA TODAY Sports

Best Conferences by Coaches

5. ACC: Frank Beamer's best years might be behind him. We'll see. David Cutcliffe is terrific, isn't he? And don't forget triple-option master Paul Johnson.

4. Big Ten: The strongest league at the top, with three coaches in our top six. Unfortunately, the strength doesn't go from top to bottom (or even close).

3. Pac-12: Mark Helfrich is still "the new guy" at Oregon, but he will be high on the list soon. Jim Mora, too. Kyle Whittingham was one of the last to miss the cut. Remember that Mike Leach fella?

2. Big 12: Mike Gundy nearly gave the league six coaches (out of 10) in our top 22. Dana Holgorsen and Kliff Kingsbury have excellent potential.

1. SEC: Mark Richt, Kevin Sumlin, Gus Malzahn, Butch Jones, Dan Mullen, Hugh Freeze ... and those are the guys who didn't make the list.

Best Coaching Ballers

Those who can't play, coach? Not in the cases of these guys. From great players to pretty dang good headset-wearers (or vice-versa), here are the best of guys from both worlds:

10. Joey Jones, South Alabama — He was an All-SEC receiver for Bear Bryant, so there's that.

9. Frank Solich, Ohio — Part of Bob Devaney's first class at Nebraska and was part of teams that went 38-6. All-Big Eight in 1965 and the first Cornhusker to rush for more than 200 yards in a game.

8. Kyle Whittingham, Utah — WAC Defensive Player of the Year at BYU in 1981, and he keeps on passing down that linebacker toughness to his Utes.

7. Rocky Long, San Diego State — We imagine that even as a quarterback who was WAC Player of the Year at New Mexico in 1971, he was dreaming up crazy ways to blitz himself.

6. Steve Sarkisian, USC — Nestled into the great lineage of BYU quarterbacks, Sark passed for 7,464 yards and 53 TDs as two-year man in 1995 and 1996.

5. Mike Gundy, Oklahoma State — When not handing off to Barry Sanders and Thurman Thomas, he passed for a Cowboys' record 7,997 yards as a four-year starter.

4. Jim Harbaugh, Michigan — Earned his Michigan Man chops by being Big Ten MVP, leading Wolverines to Rose Bowl after 1986 season.

3. Kliff Kingsbury, Texas Tech — Set 17 NCAA records and passed for than 12,000 yards in coach Mike Leach's wild, early days with Red Raiders.

2. Pat Fitzgerald, Northwestern — All-everything linebacker led Northwestern to the 1996 Rose Bowl ... a sentence that sounds as improbable now as it did 20 years ago. Fitz was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2008.

1. Steve Spurrier, QB, South Carolina — Looks like Mr. Heisman of 1966 will hold this spot until he retires, or until we hear, "And now, I would like to introduce our new head coach ... Tim Tebow!"

Five Terms Emphasized by the CFP Selection Committee

5. Game control
4. Potty break
3. Data points
2. Body of work vs. 13th game
1. Steak tartar appetizer

Jim Harbaugh's Five Favorite Restaurants

5. Early bird special at Golden Corral
4. Red Lobster
3. White Castle
2. Schlotzky's
1. Cracker Barrel

Let 'em Go

The controversy over the rules that grant college football players a measure of free agency for a year when they graduate has created one of the great ironies ever. These are players who generally have done *everything* that being a true student-athlete asks of them. So, naturally, coaches are distressed over the graduate transfer rule. Pass the Kleenex and calm down about the graduate transfer rule because ...

5. So now we're penalizing kids for graduating?
4. Freedom. Sweet freedom.
3. Russell Wilson. That worked OK for everyone.
2. Vernon Adams more than earned his way to Oregon.
1. Coaches leave on a whim. Why can't kids for one season?

JOSH ROSEN
Photo by Juan Lainez / MarinMedia.org / Cal Sport Media via AP Images

6 Impact True Freshmen

6. Martez Ivey, OL, Florida — Put him at tackle and forget about it for the next three years.

5-4. Shy Tuttle and Kahlil McKenzie, DTs, Tennessee — Not light in the caboose, these big-time pluggers are exactly what the Vols need.

3. Iman Marshall, CB, USC — Adoree' Jackson and JuJu Smith last year, and now Marshall? Mercy.

2. Malik Jefferson, LB, Texas — Potential pillar of Charlie Strong rebuild.

1. Josh Rosen, QB, UCLA — A new Golden Boy in L.A. Now all he has to do is never lose to USC and win three Pac-12 titles.

WESTON STEELHAMMER
Photo by Ron Chenoy-USA TODAY Sports

Fun with Names

With all due regrets that Dee Liner is no longer on the D-line for Alabama ...

- **Best name for an NFL prospect:** Money Hunter, Arkansas State.
- **Worst name to avoid scrutiny from the NCAA:** Dameon Gamblin, New Mexico.
- Who wins a fight between Washington State's Hercules Mata'afa and USF's Thor Jozwiak?
- **Best name for a character in a Chuck Norris action movie:** Weston Steelhammer, Air Force.
- **Player who best represents his team and his team's color scheme:** Baylor Black ... uh, from Baylor.
- **Best name for a linebacker:** Tie — Eric Striker, Oklahoma; C.J. Stalker, Virginia; Bam Bradley, Pitt.
- **Player most likely to get "Hakuna Matata" stuck in your head:** Eastern Michigan's Lion King.
- **Best name for a quarterback:** Gunner Kiel, Cincinnati.
- **Best name for a guy who should be playing quarterback:** Khane Pass. Alas, he's an incoming freshman defensive back at Louisville.
- **Most likely to be curtsied to:** Western Kentucky's Prince Charles Iworah.
- **Player most likely to steal your girlfriend:** Texas freshman Devonaire Clarington.

5 Reasons the Big Ten will break the bank

The large league will be negotiating a new TV deal in couple of years, and the timing is enational, and the sky isn't even the limit.

5. Penn State has rebounded nicely from the massive NCAA penalties.
4. A certain third-string quarterback.
3. "SEC schools recruited our guys too," says Ohio State's J.T. Barrett
2. First national championship in 12 years.
1. Jim Harbaugh said yes!

5 Reasons for an 8-Team Playoff Right Now!

The CFP is just into the second year of a 12-year contract? Twelve years? Riiiiight.

5. The bowl system not only survived, but thrived. There are three new ones this season, 42 total. *Forty-freakin'-two.*
4. The college football postseason was worth $500 million in '14. What would an eight-team playoff be worth?
3. Eight gets ALL the deserving teams into the act.
2. Bring all corners of the country into the fun.
1. Put an end to the Big 12 whining.

Top 10 CFB follows on Twitter

You know, other than @lindyssportsmag and all of our writers, etc. ...

1. @BruceFeldmanCFB — The ESPN-turned-CBS-turned-Fox reporter/commentator is one of the most plugged-in media gurus in all the land. Yes, he bounces around like Bobby Petrino, but that's because he's so in-demand.
2. @DanWetzel — Yahoo! Sports' Dan Wetzel is the dean of the deep feature. He's also witty with his takedowns on Twitter.
3. @EDSBS — The account of SB Nation editorial director Spencer Hall, EDSBS is just a snippet of the hilarity found on the main site, Every Day Should Be Saturday. Hall is college football's best satirist.
4. @JppalmCBS — Jerry Palm, CBS' resident postseason prognosticator, has his pulse on the college football playoffs.
5. @slmandel — Fox Sports' Stewart Mandel — by way of Sports Illustrated — is all over the scene chasing down college football tidbits. He can spin a tale or two, too.
6. @KegsNEggs — Adam Kramer lambasts those who should be mocked across the college football landscape for Bleacher Report.
7. @DanRubenstein/@TyHildenbrandt — The talented duo cohost the Solid Verbal podcast, which is your one-stop-shop for college football news and sandwich tips.
8. @ClayTravisBGID — Snarky at times, hostile at others, but always up-to-date with the best SEC bashing, Clay Travis is the Finebaum of the written word.
9. @McMurphyESPN — A traditional reporter in a modern world, ESPN's Brett McMurphy does his best to stay above the muck.
10. @TomLuginbill/@jcshurbutt — ESPN's top recruiting expert and one of 247Sports national recruiting analysts, Luginbill and Shurbutt provide plenty of prospect information need.

Five Reasons the SEC's Dynasty Is Over

5. Ohio State
4. Ohio State's coach
3. Harder to win two playoff games than one BCS game
2. Alabama's quarterback situation
1. You try getting through the SEC West unbeaten

'HarBo' Taking it all on, Taking it all in

MODERN DAY BO, HARBAUGH IS EVERY OUNCE A MICHIGAN MAN

BY DENNIS DODD | Photo by Rick Osentoski-USA TODAY Sports

ANN ARBOR, Mich. – The first few minutes of an interview with Michigan's new coach have been mostly small talk.

Then, he is asked about *The Old Man*. Jim Harbaugh transforms.

"I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING YOU LITTLE SON OF A BITCH! YOU COCKY SON OF A BITCH COMING INTO MY MEETING 10 MINUTES LATE!" he booms, recounting a Michigan football meeting of 33 years ago — his first as a player. *"YOU WILL NEVER PLAY A DOWN OF FOOTBALL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, NOT WHILE I'M HERE.*

"YOU GOT IT?"

And, yes, Jim Harbaugh got it.

That admonishment of Harbaugh by Bo Schembechler resonates now the same as it did in 1982. A kid who went to high school part of his youth in Ann Arbor, whose dad had coached for Bo ... was dead to The Old Man that day.

All it took was being late to his first meeting as a Wolverine. Ten minutes might as well have been 10 hours.

It didn't matter that lifelong friend Jim Minick blew a muffler and was late driving Harbaugh to the facility. Bo didn't give a flip that neither of them was wearing a watch, or the horror they experienced driving up Main Street seeing a bank clock click to 4:05 for a 4:00 meeting.

Harbaugh still has nightmares about it.

"There's a deep lasting scar there," he

said from his office, where a picture of Schembechler literally looks down on him. "It's not even a scar. It's a broken bone with a rod stuck in it. It's like a broken femur."

That's how much Michigan's new coach is disturbed by disappointing his old coach, gone now almost nine years. In that time, Harbaugh has transformed himself from plucky NFL quarterback to a 51-year-old gold standard of coaching. In that time, it's also almost hard to notice Schembechler has left.

"He's not perfect," Bo's son Shemy said of Harbaugh, "but he's the closest thing we have around here."

Michigan nailed it with Harbaugh. They know that around here. After watching the program languish for the last seven years under Rich Rodriguez and Brady Hoke, any other replacement would have been a disappointment.

They beat out the power and glory of life in the NFL by offering a rebuild. That, and a triumphant trip back to his roots. And he stuck the landing.

"I prayed about it," Harbaugh said of his decision to return to college — to Michigan. "I think Bo was talking to me again."

Renovations are what the new coach does best. Who knew the University of San Diego *had* a football team? Stanford was a Pac-12 also-ran before he arrived. The 49ers had eight losing seasons in a row.

The facilities are bigger and better than what Harbaugh remembered. Bo's old office — the one they sealed off for a time following his November 2006 death — is occupied by Minick, now the director of football operations. There's a statue in front of Schembechler Hall of the legendary coach, one that Harbaugh practically salutes.

"I love that statue," he said. "I walk in, walk out. I look at it every day."

How many schools have a "Wall of Wins," 915 footballs in a giant display painted with the score of every Michigan victory in history? How many schools have a football from 1903, from the only game Michigan gave up points that season? Aside from that 6-6 tie with Minnesota, Michigan outscored everyone else 565-0.

None of the cutting-edge, interactive displays make reference to Harbaugh as a coach. Not yet. Not when he hasn't worked a game from the sidelines at the school that gave him his college identity, his professional prep — and now — a ticket back to where it began.

Entering the 137th year of Michigan football, Harbaugh is in Year 1 as its undisputed leader.

"Love" is a strange way to put it when recalling that early trauma from 1982. Harbaugh tried to sneak in a back door to that first meeting. An assistant coach made him walk the walk of shame — to the front where Bo could see him.

Didn't have a clock? *"I'LL CLOCK YOU RIGHT IN THE HEAD. GO SIT DOWN."*

And for what seemed like forever, Harbaugh did. It would be fair to say Bo buried him after his misdeed. Schembechler would yell at assistants who dared even to speak to him at practice: *"DON'T TALK TO HIM. DON'T YOU EVER TALK TO HIM."*

It took a while. Actually, it took until the 1983 season before Harbaugh even played. His only currency was diligence. He moved up the depth chart. After an injury to starter Steve Smith in the 1983 Rose Bowl, Harbaugh suddenly became the backup and was told by Schembechler to warm up.

"He was thinking about putting me in," Harbaugh thought. "He must think I'm OK."

Except that he didn't. That 1982 season ended without Harbaugh seeing the field.

"I remember thinking, 'I'll never play a down of football here,'" he recalled.

As you know by now, Harbaugh eventually did see the field. He was Michigan's first 300-yard passer. Ever. His career efficiency number was tops in the NCAA record book for 12 years. A Big Ten MVP, he was third in the 1986 Heisman voting.

Bo also won a few games, setting the standard for what Harbaugh is inheriting.

"If Michigan is looking for someone to walk up to Urban (Meyer) in pregame and punch him in the nose," Ron Lynn said, "they got the right guy — literally and figuratively."

Lynn is Stanford's 70-year-old player personnel director hired at the school in 2008. He's seen up close what is about to happen here.

The spring game was full-go. Everyone was tackled to the ground, including quarterbacks. That sat well even with quarterback Shane Morris, the centerpiece of last year's concussion fiasco that eventually ushered both Hoke and athletic director Dave Brandon out the door.

Life under Harbaugh in the spring meant four-hour practices — "a very serious vibe" according to Morris.

"If not," he said, "we get passed up."

Part of the Harbaugh charm is that he is hard to figure out. The coach known for his dress slacks (khakis) casually slipped in a chaw during the interview. SEC coaches had kittens when it was announced his coaches would attend a satellite camp in Prattville, Ala., near Auburn.

Cracker Barrel learned about the coach's affection for its country-themed restaurants and stockpile of old Andy Griffith and Kung Fu DVDs. They sent him a rocking chair inscribed with his name.

"I have a deep abiding love for Cracker Barrel," Harbaugh said. "Why would I want to eat somewhere else?"

The coaches boasted he has stripped down the weight room to a more austere look. Upon arriving, he was repulsed by walls filled with pictures and inspirational quotes.

"It was shiny, like somebody from Chicago came in ... a P.R. firm," he said.

> "My dad, my wife Sarah, and Bo. Those three people are the secret to my success. I've done exactly what they told me, exactly how they told me to do it."
>
> **— Jim Harbaugh**

Now the weight room is, well, mostly weights surrounded by white cinder block walls.

"This isn't a slide show," he said. "This is work."

Slowly, the young(er) man is channeling the old man. Jim's dad Jack worked for seven years (1973-79) as Bo's defensive backs coach. In the latter part of his NFL career, Jim shuttled back and forth between the Colts and Western Kentucky. There, he was a volunteer coach for his father who eventually won a Division I-AA title.

"(Bo) literally put a roof over our heads, food on our table — hiring my dad," Jim said.

He's old-school enough to have a picture centered above his desk of Bo yelling something to him during a Rose Bowl. ("He's not yelling at me; he's giving me a play.") Minick is a former Marine colonel, a Middle East veteran, who has spoken to Harbaugh teams in the past.

Harbaugh trusted his instincts enough to hire Jedd Fisch without a prior relationship. The former Jacksonville Jaguars offensive coordinator was brought in to oversee the

THE HARBAUGH FILE

BORN: Dec. 23, 1963

HIGH SCHOOL: Palo Alto (Calif.) High

COLLEGE: Michigan (1982-86)

COLLEGE CAREER: He redshirted in 1982 and played sparingly in 1983. He was 3-1 as a starter in 1984 before a broken arm ended his season. Harbaugh's career blossomed as a junior, when he led the nation in passing efficiency — a first for a Big Ten quarterback — and he led the Wolverines to a 10-1-1 record and a No. 2 final ranking. As a senior, he was the Big Ten Player of the Year, finishing third in the Heisman voting, behind Miami quarterback Vinny Testaverde and Temple running back Paul Palmer.

NFL CAREER: Harbaugh was the 26th pick of the first round in 1987, going to the Chicago Bears, where he started a 15-year NFL career. He spent seven seasons in Chicago, the final three as the starter, then signed with Indianapolis. Four seasons, and 46 starts later, he was traded to Baltimore, when he played for one season, before going to San Diego for two seasons. He was in camp with Detroit in 2000 and on the roster for part of the season with Carolina, but he did not play. In all: Harbaugh started 140 of 177 games played, completed 2,305 of 3,918 passes (58.8 percent) for 26,288 yards, with 129 touchdowns and 117 interceptions. He also ran for 2,787 yards. "Captain Comeback" was credited with 19-game winning drives.

Chicago Bears quarterback Jim Harbaugh (4) in action against the Dallas Cowboys in the 1991 NFC Wild Card Playoff game at Soldier Field.

Photo by USA TODAY Sports

COACHING CAREER Harbaugh is 107-49-1 as a head coach. His experience:

Years	Team	Position	Record
1994-2001	Western Kentucky	Volunteer Asst. Coach	
2002-03	Oakland Raiders	Quarterbacks	
2004-06	San Diego	Head Coach	29-6
2007-10	Stanford	Head Coach	29-21
2011-14	San Francisco 49ers	Head Coach	49-22-1

passing game and coach quarterbacks.

They quickly lined up a quarterback stockpile that includes Houston transfer John O'Korn (eligible in 2016) and Iowa graduate transfer Jake Rudock (eligible in 2015). Recruits are already being sent postcards that detail the Wolverines' QB lineage from Benny Friedman (1924-26) to Denard Robinson (2009-2012) ... with Tom Brady in the middle.

Harbaugh has been a Twitter junkie since taking over — all the while knowing the recruiting impact. There was love for East Bay rapper G-Eazy. The same for Judge Judy, who Harbaugh celebrated on Twitter for her contract extension to 2020 (at $43 million per).

"I love watching her on TV," he said. "If we could just get her on the Supreme Court, then we'd really be in a pear tree as a country."

A pear tree? Half the time Harbaugh is a child wrapped in an enigma.

"He loves birthdays, stuff like that," Fisch said. "I told him, 'I'll give you a good anniversary.'"

Fisch reminded the world in a tweet that 12 years ago this spring, he suffered an aortic aneurysm while running. Doctors later told him he had a 30 percent chance of paralysis, 30 percent chance of kidney failure and 40 percent chance of death.

"I managed to survive all three," Fisch said.

"There's something special about him," Harbaugh said.

Michigan's coach is a notorious grinder. While at Stanford, Harbaugh noticed Fisch's prowess in the NFL with Baltimore, Denver, Minnesota and Seattle. Together at Michigan, they spent nine days together in a private plane scouring the country for the first Harbaugh recruiting class that finished 38th nationally, according to 247Sports.

"It's like being dipped in magic waters again," Harbaugh said of recruiting.

All of it leads to two conclusions about Michigan's new coach:

1. There is only a handful of men who could take it all in at Michigan, as well as take it all over.

2. Harbaugh really didn't have to do this. His NFL career was just starting when he decided to come back to his alma mater.

"My dad, my wife Sarah, and Bo," Harbaugh said. "Those three people are the secret to my success. I've done exactly what they told me, exactly how they told me to do it."

But when he prayed about what may be the biggest coaching decision of his life, did he feel Bo's presence here?

"There certainly are a lot of reminders," Harbaugh said.

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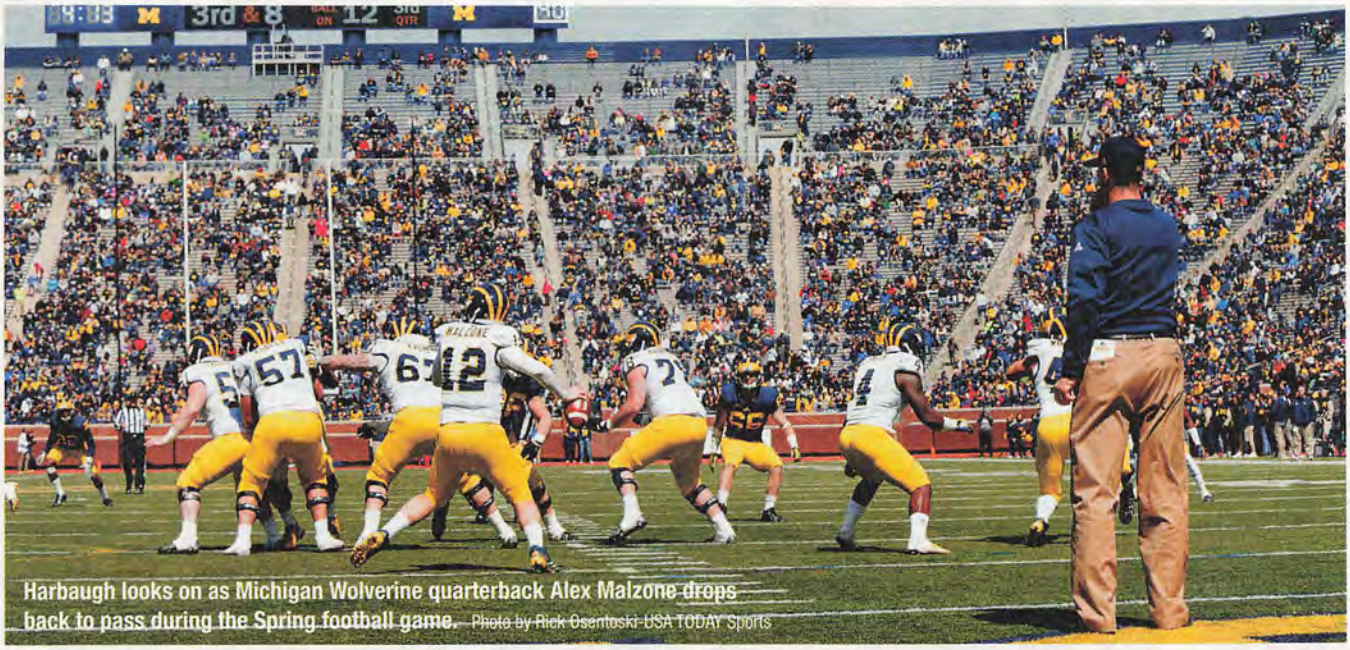

Harbaugh looks on as Michigan Wolverine quarterback Alex Malzone drops back to pass during the Spring football game. Photo by Rick Osentoski-USA TODAY Sports

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE COACH

Sometimes, good programs break bad.

Tradition, facilities, fervent fan base, money ... those things might always be in place, but a college powerhouse isn't a college powerhouse unless the man stalking the sideline, dazzling recruits and scheming in the coaches' room says it is.

It's all about the coach. It's *always* about the coach.

Think about it: Alabama never stopped being Alabama after Gene Stallings' final season in 1996. Tradition, facilities, fan base, money. Check, check, check, check. Nothing changed. Except the coach. And, man, did they change fast over the next decade — Mike DuBose, Dennis Franchione, Mike Price (kind of), Mike Shula.

The Tide, lost in the college football wilderness for 10 years, then found its man — Nick Saban. Alabama became Ala-damn-bama again because of the coach. You know the rest.

And so it can be with Michigan.

Nothing has been fundamentally wrong with Michigan, except it had the wrong coaches at the wrong times, with Rich Rodriguez and then Brady Hoke. It happens. No program is immune. The trick is to keep picking out winners — which only some of the very top programs in college football history have been able to do.

Here is a look at the 10 winningest programs in major college football, and their recent coaching history (note how things rarely stay the same):

1. Michigan

(915 wins, 4 coaches in past decade)

You could make the case that Rich Rodriguez was building something by the end of his third season, but he never got a fourth, and then Brady Hoke took RichRod's recruits across the goal line with an 11-win debut. That was fools' gold, as the Wolverines had diminishing returns in the next three seasons.

2. Notre Dame

(882 wins, 2 coaches in past decade)

Charlie Weis struck out, and Brian Kelly took over in 2010. There was that where-in-the-world-did-that-come-from 2012 season, but mostly Kelly is trying to break out of his eight-, nine-win groove. This could be the year.

3. Texas

(881 wins, 2 coaches in past decade)

The Longhorns turned to Charlie Strong after the program stagnated under national-title winning Mack Brown. Strong is just about finished putting the brooms away from his 2014 house cleaning, and we'll know a lot more about if he's the right guy by December 2016.

4. Nebraska

(874 wins, 3 coaches in past decade)

Bill Callahan wasn't close to being the guy; Bo Pelini was the four-loss guy; and now comes nice-guy Mike Riley, hoping for a show-stopping closing act to a very good career. Very good just doesn't cut it in Lincoln, though, right Bo?

5. Ohio State

(863 wins, 3 coaches in past decade)

The three coaches includes Luke Fickell's interim tenure after Jim Tressell's 2011 resignation amid scandal, and then the Buckeyes lured Urban Meyer out of retirement. This is how you do it, folks.

T-6. Alabama

(850 wins, 2 coaches in past decade)

Saban is now working into his ninth year of excellence.

T-6. Oklahoma

(850 wins, 1 coach in past decade)

Stability! Well, kind of. Bob Stoops has had to shake up his staff in recent seasons to try to get to the mountaintop, but he's had double-digit wins in 12 of 16 seasons, so he's still doing something right.

8. Penn State

(849 wins, 3 coaches in past decade)

Joe Paterno *was* Penn State. Bill O'Brien wasn't. Is James Franklin?

9. Tennessee

(811 wins, 4 coaches in past decade)

The Vols have been a mess after the Phillip Fulmer era. One-year Lane Kiffin was part of the problem, but a rival SEC coach told *Lindy's* this spring that "Derek Dooley did a horrible job managing Tennessee's roster. Dooley is the one that really took that program to the bottom." UT is on the rise under Butch Jones.

10. USC

(805 wins, 3 coaches in past decade)

You can go back a couple of decades with USC to help prove our point. In that time, the Trojans have only been feared, have only been "USC good," when Pete Carroll was the coach. Facilities, tradition, money ... it didn't change. It's simply all about the coach.

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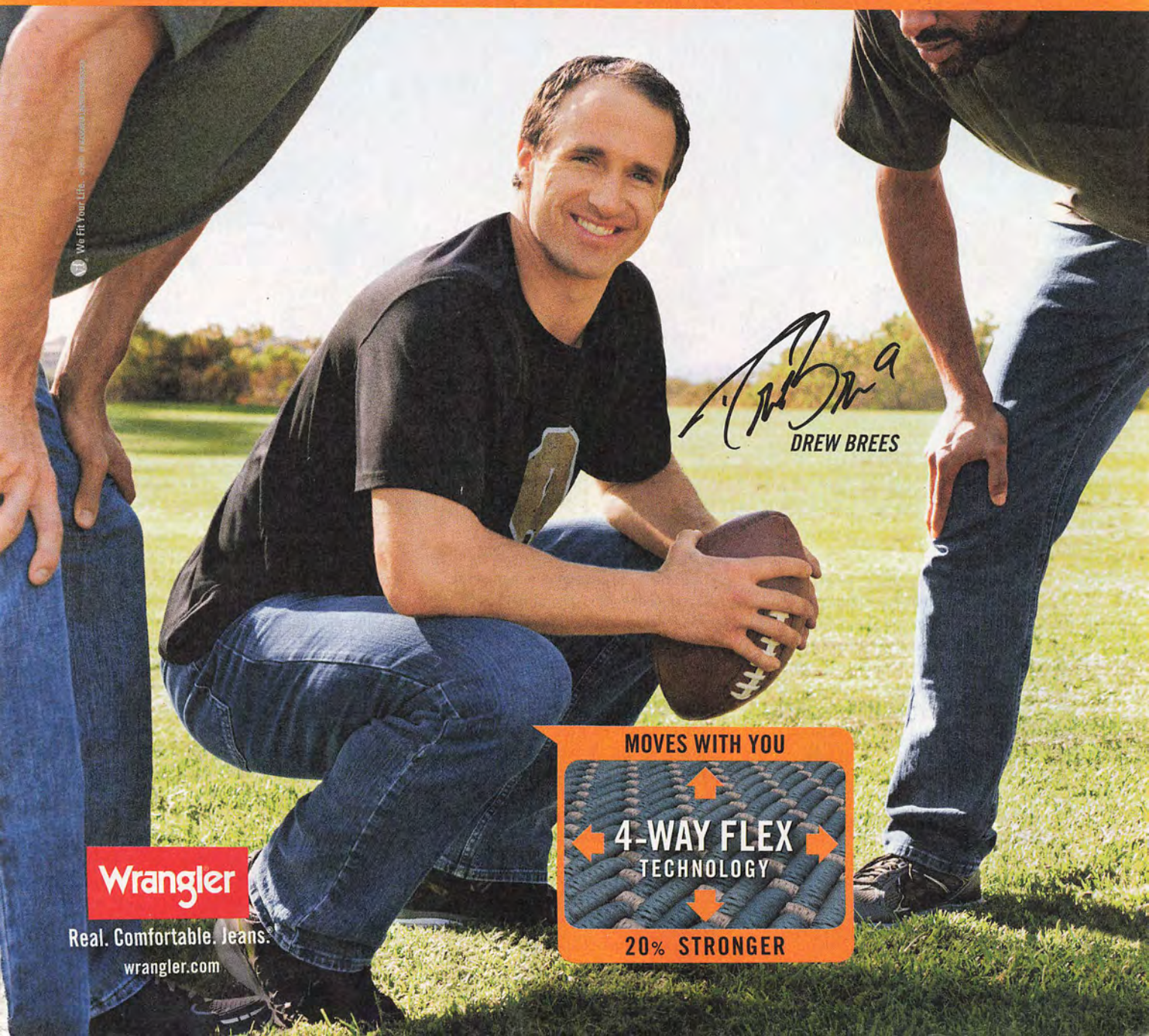


SCOPING THE NATION

The playoff did its job ... so what's next?

BY ANTHONY GIMINO AND STEVE GREENBERG

Illustrations by Tim Williams

That was easy.

The first year of the four-team College Football Playoff was a roaring success, enhancing the regular season, retaining all of the outrage for talk radio, providing record-setting cable viewership for the elimination games and delivering a champion that everyone (well, almost everyone) could finally, correctly, describe as "undisputed."

Yeah, the playoff did what it was supposed to do.

And it made a mountain of cash, of course.

Amid the money and the TV eyeballs and the drama on the field, the NCAA even made a sensible ruling. We know, right? About a week before the championship game, the NCAA said it was OK for the CFP to help pay travel costs for players' families (up to $1,250 each for 1-2 people). Imagine that: A start down the road of common sense.

So, what does the second half of the decade have in store?

Let's begin with our top 10 storylines ...

1. #RollBuckeyes? Ohio State's road to Repeatville is bare and dry — no need to negotiate a confusing GPS-infused route to Glendale, Ariz.: Win the Big Ten (which surely will carry a ticket to the playoffs), win a semifinal, and win the championship game. Starting the season atop the polls makes this very doable, and not just in the champs-until-somebody-knocks-'em-off sense. These Buckeyes could be Urban Meyer's best team ever. An opening game at Virginia Tech, the only team to beat OSU in 2014, looms larger-than-large.

2. QB battles gone wild. They're everywhere — cases in point, the four programs that reached the first playoff. Who will lead Ohio State? Will it be Cardale Jones or J.T. Barrett — or Braxton Miller? And who will replace Oregon's great Marcus Mariota — veteran backup Jeff Lockie or Eastern Washington transfer Vernon Adams? Without Jameis Winston at Florida State, Sean Maguire is trying to hold off a gaggle of young arms. And in Tuscaloosa, Jake Coker's grip on the Alabama starting job is tenuous at best.

3. The new Big 12 order. Do we even have to pretend Oklahoma and Texas are the leading programs in this conference anymore? TCU and Baylor — still ticked off beyond belief at being left out of the 2014 playoff — look like the teams to beat *again*. The Horned Frogs have

to come out firing in the opener at Minnesota, but they should be OK there. And they get Baylor in Fort Worth in the regular-season finale, which (sorry, Texas State Fair) could be the league's monster game of the season.

4. The Big Two? You might've heard about the hiring at Michigan of some guy named Jim Harbaugh. Just how fast will Jimmy Ballgame restore glory to the Maize and Blue, and will the Wolverines' epic rivalry with Ohio State completely overshadow the rest of the Big Ten? East Division rivals Michigan State and Penn State will have their say, as will West powers-that-be Wisconsin and Nebraska, but the Buckeyes are head-and-shoulders above those programs — and Harbaugh's chase of Meyer is brilliant theater.

5. SEC FAQs. Actually, it boils down to one question: Is there a national-title contender in the house? Alabama is everybody's knee-jerk answer, but the Crimson Tide faces as much uncertainty as they have in any recent season. Auburn and LSU have high hopes, but it's hard to envision any West Division team running the table in the perceived best division in the perceived best conference in the land. Georgia stands out in the East, but the Bulldogs have a brutal road schedule. Chant "S-E-C! S-E-C!" at your own risk.

6. The Heisman pre-leaders. If you have to ask who Trevone Boykin is, you're hopelessly behind the curve. The TCU quarterback isn't awash in publicity, but his play was spectacular in 2014 and there'll be no ignoring a second performance of that caliber. Ohio State running back Ezekiel Elliott joins Boykin as a front-runner, but we otherwise love a wide-open field like this one.

7. Year of the Running Back. This 2015 group is ridiculously loaded. There's Elliott, the breakout star of last year's postseason, along with LSU monster Leonard Fournette, Oklahoma record-setter Samaje Perine and Wisconsin successor-to-the-throne Corey Clement. Ah, but we're just getting started: Georgia's Nick Chubb, Oregon's Royce Freeman, UCLA's Paul Perkins, Arizona's Nick Wilson, Pittsburgh's James Conner, Alabama's Derrick Henry ... we could go on, but you get the idea.

8. Top turf wars. The best two divisions in college football — SEC West and Pac-12 South — are so much better than everybody else, it isn't even funny. With Arkansas coming along and Texas A&M widely expected to bounce back, the SEC West is deeper than ever. And once again, you might as well pull a name out of a hat when trying to pick the Pac-12 South winner ... as long as it doesn't come up "Colorado," anyway.

9. The Muschamp Effect. Auburn is paying Will Muschamp a head coach's ransom to be its defensive coordinator, a move that'll look terrible if Muschamp fails as he did as head coach at Florida. But why would he fail? Running a defense — just him, his players and all those beautiful X's and O's — is the man's sweet spot. If Muschamp makes the sort of impact at Auburn that many expect he will, watch the market value of the top coordinators continue to skyrocket.

10. Do the Irish have their mojo back? Last season was strange and, at times, awful for Notre Dame, but 2015 could be special. Good luck finding a team anywhere with more returning starters than Brian Kelly and his staff have to work with. Offensively, this should be Kelly's best Irish team by a long stretch with Malik Zaire ending up with the quarterback job. An opening test at home against Texas will be a huge tone-setter.

PROJECTING THE BIG BOWLS

Remember, there are contracts in place for some of the Big Six bowls that fall outside of the four-team playoff. The Rose retains its Big Ten/Pac-12 partners; the Sugar will have teams from the SEC and Big 12. If champs from those conferences qualify for the playoff, then the bowl chooses a replacement from that league.

The four-team playoff is almost certain to exclude teams from outside the Big Five conferences, but at least it guarantees a major bowl for one team from outside the power structure. Last year, that meant Mountain West champion Boise State landed in the Fiesta (rather than in the Las Vegas Bowl in the old BCS system), where the Broncos fabulously pulled the Statue of Liberty play from the archives to help defeat Arizona.

Here is how *Lindy's* sees it all shaking out this year:

*(**Note:** At-large means any team in the country — so probably a Big Five conference team, while Group means teams from the small conferences: Group of Five):*

PEACH BOWL
Thursday, Dec. 31
Atlanta, Ga. • Georgia Dome
At-large/Group vs. At-large/Group
Lindy's pick: Georgia vs. Clemson

CFP SEMIFINAL: COTTON BOWL
Thursday, Dec. 31
Arlington, Texas • AT&T Stadium
National semifinal
Lindy's pick: TCU vs. Alabama

CFP SEMIFINAL: ORANGE BOWL
Thursday, Dec. 31
Miami • Sun Life Stadium
National semifinal
Lindy's pick: Ohio State vs. Oregon

FIESTA BOWL
Friday, Jan. 1
Glendale, Ariz. • Univ. of Phoenix Stadium
At-large/Group vs. At-large/Group
Lindy's pick: Notre Dame vs. Boise State

ROSE BOWL
Friday, Jan. 1
Pasadena, Calif. • Rose Bowl
Big Ten vs. Pac-12
Lindy's pick: USC vs. Michigan State

SUGAR BOWL
Friday, Jan. 1
New Orleans • Superdome
Big 12 vs. SEC
Lindy's pick: Auburn vs. Baylor

CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Monday, Jan. 11
Glendale, Arizona • Univ. of Phoenix Stadium
Lindy's pick: Ohio State vs. TCU

COLLEGE FOOTBALL
PLAYOFF

SCOPING THE NATION

NEW YEAR'S EVE IT IS

Last year's semifinals worked out like clockwork on New Year's Day: Oregon and Ohio State winning the Rose and Sugar bowls to advance to the national championship game 10 days later.

If only it could always be that simple. But it's college football. Nothing is ever that simple. This season, the semifinals will be on New Year's Eve in the Orange and Cotton Bowls, preceding New Year's Day for games that are ... well, not semifinals.

Since there are six big games in the playoff rotation, the College Football Playoff deciders settled on a pair of tripleheaders on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

An important consideration is that in years that the Rose and Sugar are not semifinals, they still hold the New Year's Day time slots. After all, the Rose has to pair up with its parade, and why would anyone want to mess up a New Orleans New Year's Eve with a football game? So, the games are New Year's Day in Pasadena and New Year's Night in New Orleans. Follow us so far?

OK, so the Orange and Cotton are semifinals this season, and ESPN saw the problem of this sequence of events: The TV network pushed in the offseason to get the semifinals moved from Thursday night, Dec. 31, to the much-more-desirable Saturday, Jan. 2 slot ... but nooooooooo. That would make way too much sense.

This means it's likely that the Rose and Sugar will be playing on New Year's Day with four second-place teams, while the Big Ten, Pac-12, SEC and Big 12 champs are occupied the night before. So much for building continuity and momentum in a bowl season.

The CFP says it set up a 12-year plan for tripleheaders on Dec. 31 and Jan. 1, and (no matter how flawed that plan is) it didn't want to break that attempt to establish tradition in only the second year.

TIME FOR A NICE, DEEP BREATH

Folks, we have earned a deep breath, with the breakneck rate of changes that college football has embraced in the past few years. Consider that the WAC still existed when the decade began. So did the Big East.

Nine teams have been added to the Football Bowl Subdivision since then, including 2015 newbie Charlotte. The Pac-12, Big Ten and SEC now have their own networks. Even Nick Saban is running a hurry-up offense ... well, at least some of the time.

OK, exhale.

For a moment, not much has changed from 2014. The top teams still figure to be the top teams. There was one spectacular hire (welcome back, Jim!), but only 15 total coaching changes. Charlotte is the only new team, replacing disbanded UAB, keeping FBS membership at 128. Navy, no longer independent, has joined the American Athletic Conference — accounting for the sum of the conference alignment news.

Now, another deep breath and hold it, because more change is coming. Expanded playoffs? An NCAA breakaway for the Big 5 conferences? The first $10 million coach? Pay to play? Player unions?

Spring Champs

Y'all know it doesn't count. It's not real football. Two words: Glorified practice. You don't even get to mock another team, make up funny words to their fight songs, insult their cheerleaders.

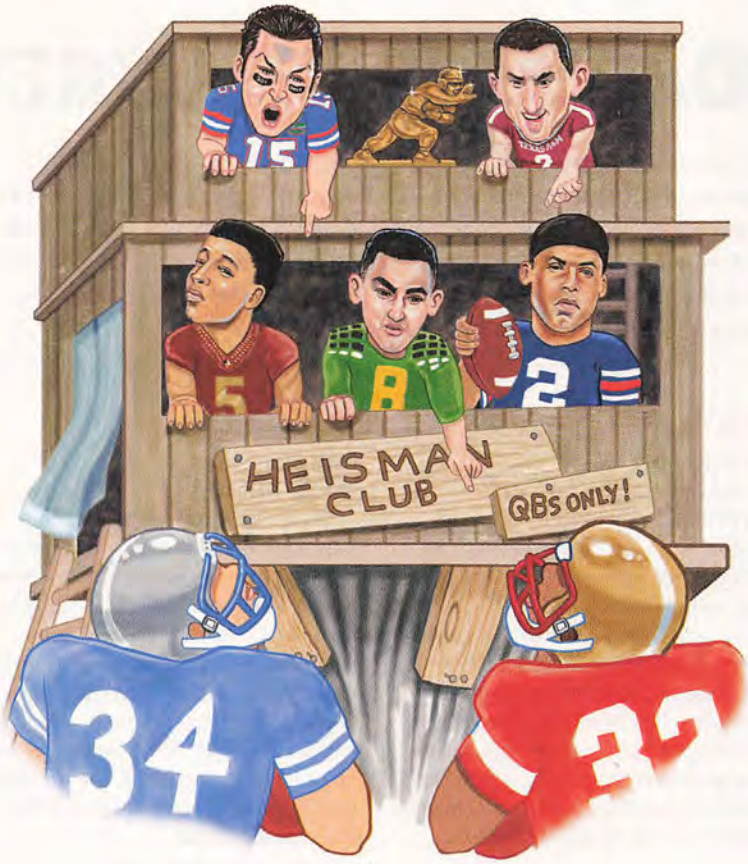
In some ways, spring games are less important than ever — year-round conditioning (you know, the *voluntary* kind, wink, wink) allows teams to hit the ground running and do real work during the 14 practices before the final scrimmage. Yet, these are increasingly made-for-TV events because air time on those conference networks isn't going to program itself.

Whatever your motivation for going to spring games, well, bless you for it. We raise our Passion Bucket to you. And especially you, Columbus. Ohio State set a national record by drawing 99,391 to Ohio Stadium in April. Impressive.

In fact, the top nine spring game attendances came from two conferences — the Big Ten and SEC. Here are the figures/estimates from those nine games:

1. Ohio State: 99,391
2. Nebraska: 76,881
3. Penn State: 68,000
4. Alabama: 65,175
5. Tennessee: 63,016
6. Auburn: 62,143
7. Michigan: 60,000
8. Michigan State: 48,000
9. Georgia: 46,815

Ohio State Spring Game 2015 | Photo by Khris Hale Icon Sportswire via AP Images



Heisman Watch

The ol' stiff-armed statue should be remade in the image of a player in mid-throw. A quarterback has won eight of the past nine Heismans, and 13 of 15 since 2000 (and that's even including the vacated 2005 award of running back Reggie Bush).

Do we think that trend will continue? Uh, yeah, but this *is* the Year of the Running Back (haven't you heard?), so a lot more of those rock-toting guys are going to show up on this list:

1. Trevone Boykin, QB, TCU — The senior enters the second year of a perfect marriage of offense and dual-threat athlete.

2. Ezekiel Elliott, RB, Ohio State — Two things. One, he's not an Ohio State quarterback, so we don't have to worry about whether he'll play. Two, we simply can't forget how he rushed for 696 yards in the final three games of the season, against Wisconsin, Alabama and Oregon. Wow.

3. An Ohio State quarterback — We're taking the cop-out. Take your pick — Cardale Jones, Braxton Miller or J.T. Barrett — and by the time you read this, there might be more clarity about the most fascinating quarterback race ever.

4. Derrick Henry, RB, Alabama — He gets the nod over other SEC players because he's playing for our projected SEC champ, and voters have proven they will default to an Alabama running back (see, Mark Ingram, 2009). Plus, the dude is an absolute beast.

5. Nick Chubb, RB, Georgia — He finished his freshman season with eight consecutive 100-yard performances, and the coaches will relentlessly feed him behind one of the best offensive lines in the country.

6. Cody Kessler, QB, USC — Uncannily accurate, with 39 touchdown passes, five interceptions and a 69.7 percent completion percentage last season. Now what he needs is for Steve Sarkisian to really turn him loose downfield.

7. Deshaun Watson, QB, Clemson — We're taking the view that he'll be rarin' to fly for the opener as he comes back from an ACL injury, but does it really matter? He was good enough to torment and beat South Carolina last season when his ligament was already torn.

8. Jeremy Johnson, QB, Auburn — Everyone expects the Tigers' new starter to be awesome, and it's not as if a first-year starting quarterback can't win this award. Cam Newton, Johnny Manziel, Jameis Winston ...

9. Dak Prescott, QB, Mississippi State — Love Dak. He finished eighth in the 2014 Heisman voting. But the Heisman is part function of team, and if the Bulldogs take a step back from a magical year, Prescott will be hard pressed to do more than tread water in the balloting.

10. Royce Freeman, RB, Oregon — Oregon coaches said he was one of their most improved players in the spring, and that was after he rushed for 1,365 yards as a true freshman.

HEISMAN SLEEPERS ★

1. Malik Zaire, QB, Notre Dame — The Irish quarterback situation played out in his direction, and Zaire showed in late-season games against USC and LSU that he's capable of leading an offense that should finally play up to Brian Kelly's previous standards.

2. Seth Russell, QB, Baylor — Whoever directs the Bears' attack becomes an automatic Heisman candidate.

3. Dalvin Cook, RB, Florida State — The dynamic sophomore plays for the right team and is ready to be the centerpiece of the FSU offense. Just hold on to the ball, young fella.

4. Vernon Adams, QB, Oregon — The graduate transfer from Eastern Washington amassed 10,438 passing yards and accounted for 121 touchdowns at the FCS school. Although he won't start competing for the starting job until August, if anybody in the country has the look of plug-and-play, this is the guy.

5. Somebody on the other side of the ball — We picked Ohio State defensive end Joey Bosa as our national Defensive Player of the Year, but he doesn't figure to be among the top two Heisman candidates on his own team. So, let's rule him out of this discussion. A pair of linebackers — Arizona's Scooby Wright (ninth in the Heisman last season) and Notre Dame's Jaylen Smith — have the combination of skill, stats, team and Q rating to at least deserve an invite to the party.

SCOPING THE NATION

COACHING CHANGES

The changes are relatively few, in part because only the firing of Bo Pelini at Nebraska set off a chain reaction of coaching changes — the Huskers' hiring of Oregon State's Mike Riley begat the Wisconsin opening, which begat a spot at Pittsburgh.

One trend hasn't changed: If you want to be a college head coach, go to school to study offense. Of the seven assistants moving to the big-boy headsets, only one — Pat Narduzzi — comes from the defensive side of the ball.

BUFFALO

Out: Jeff Quinn
(Alex Wood was interim coach last four games)
In: Lance Leipold

Let's start with a prediction: Leipold won't win six national titles at Buffalo, as he did — incredibly, in only eight seasons — at Division III Wisconsin-Whitewater. But the man's history of gigantic success is not to be taken lightly. Leipold will have to learn to take his lumps, but there's ground to be gained — immediately — in the MAC, and that ground will be gained with balance on offense, accountability on defense and no excuses.

CENTRAL MICHIGAN

Out: Dan Enos
In: John Bonamego

What fan base doesn't like to see an alum take the reins? Problems, though: Bonamego, 51, is a first-time head coach — at any level — and he spent the past 16 seasons coaching special teams in the NFL. Prior to that, the top college program he worked at was Army, which invites all sorts of questions about his recruiting chops. Misfit, anyone? Could be.

COLORADO STATE

Out: Jim McElwain
(Dave Baldwin coached bowl game)
In: Mike Bobo

Last time CSU needed a new coach, it landed a first-timer who'd built a platform as an offensive coordinator for an SEC power. Rinse, repeat. Bobo is Georgia to the core, though, and seems much farther afield in Fort Collins than did McElwain, who had spent most of his life out West. So this is Bobo's chance to prove himself, and he inherits a hard-working, high-achieving Rams group that should make the transition bearable for all involved. Mind you, Bobo won't have quarterback Garrett Grayson to run things.

FLORIDA

Out: Will Muschamp
(D.J. Durkin coached bowl game)
In: Jim McElwain

Do Gators fans even know what a decent offense looks like anymore? If nothing else, McElwain will revive that side of the ball; his resume as an offensive coach borders on brilliant. But questions? There are a few: Will the program lose its defensive identity? Can McElwain really swim with the recruiting sharks in the SEC? Is a nice-guy approach what's needed after the tumult of Muschamp's reign? Nothing less than a return to national-title contention will be good enough.

HOUSTON

Out: Tony Levine
(David Gibbs coached bowl game)
In: Tom Herman

The Cougars came around defensively under Levine, but the offense tailed off from where it had been during Kevin Sumlin's tenure. Herman's job is merely to restore every bit of the luster to UH football, and that means scoring big and, of course, producing high-octane quarterbacks. Herman has a QB battle on his hands in Year 1, which is familiar territory for a guy who coached up J.T. Barrett and Cardale Jones at Ohio State. Herman doesn't have that sort of talent to work with, but his methods are proven.

KANSAS

Out: Charlie Weis (Clint Bowen was interim coach last eight games)
In: David Beaty

There's nowhere to go but up for Beaty in his first head coaching job, and his positive vibes can only help after a miserable Jayhawks run under the dour Weis. Will Beaty break through in recruiting? He'd better, because that's why KU hired him. Retaining 2014 interim coach Clint Bowen as defensive coordinator was a wise move. Still, it's hard to envision the Jayhawks climbing from the depths of the Big 12 anytime soon.

MICHIGAN

Out: Brady Hoke
In: Jim Harbaugh

There's no reason to pretend this wasn't the grand-slam hire of all hires, right? Harbaugh reinvented the wheel at Stanford and then kicked it up a notch with the 49ers. No one else would have given Michigan fans reason to believe that toppling Urban Meyer and Ohio State is possible. The Buckeyes are far ahead of their rivals entering 2015, but watch the gap close quickly and dramatically. The Wolverines went tragically soft under Rich Rodriguez and then Hoke. Harbaugh will gnaw off his own khakis before he lets that continue.

Jim Harbaugh | Photo by Rick Osentoski-USA TODAY Sports

NEBRASKA

Out: Bo Pelini
(Barney Cotton coached bowl game)
In: Mike Riley

You might've noticed that Pelini wasn't exactly warm and fuzzy. Riley is perhaps the most likeable person in this dog-eat-dog sport: *Everybody* loves the guy. So there's that; Big Red Nation will *like* its new coach a whole lot. But will Riley continue — let alone improve upon — the program's maddening run of seven consecutive four-loss seasons? On the one hand, this hire was inspired by a desire for happiness, but don't kid yourself: The program is desperate to move up in the Big Ten. It seems to point to a new reality for Huskers' fans: Are they ready to deal with more also-ran seasons if their coach conducts himself well? Or will Riley show that nice guys can finish first?

OREGON STATE

Out: Mike Riley
In: Gary Andersen

Riley's fan base — which includes the media covering the program — will have to get used to a guy who doesn't ooze friendliness, longing only to instill toughness in his team. Andersen's choice to leave Wisconsin for Corvallis remains befuddling from purely a football standpoint, but we get it; that part of the country is more Andersen's speed, and he'll have unadulterated power at OSU that he never was going to have in Madison. Lots of luck chasing the fellas from Eugene though.

PITTSBURGH

Out: Paul Chryst
(Joe Rudolph coached bowl game)
In: Pat Narduzzi

Imagine that, a new football coach at Pittsburgh. At least Chryst gave the Panthers three seasons of stability, although those seasons reeked of .500 results. Meanwhile, Narduzzi, having dialed up Michigan State's defense as its coordinator, became one of the hottest assistants in the land. If Pitt was going to go the assistant route all along, Narduzzi would have to have been seen as a home run. But remember, this is his first time running a program.

SMU

Out: June Jones
(Tom Mason was interim coach last 10 games)
In: Chad Morris

No-brainer alert: The Mustangs perked up with their hire. Morris is an offensive whiz whose wide-open style meshes beautifully with much of Texas' high school scene. More to the point, SMU — coming off a hideous 1-11 campaign — needed a heavy dose of hope, and Morris provides that and then some. There will be a sizable leap in the AAC standings in Year 1.

TROY

Out: Larry Blakeney
In: Neal Brown

All Brown, a first-time head coach, has to do at Troy is create a new identity after the Trojans' 24-year run under Larry Blakeney. And that'll be, well, hugely difficult. But Brown, only 35, is a real go-getter, having done solid work as offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Texas Tech and Kentucky. Before that, he coached at Troy, so he shouldn't be out of his depth. This looks like an ideal fit.

TULSA

Out: Bill Blankenship
In: Philip Montgomery

If you like Art Briles — and who doesn't? — then you have to like this hire by Tulsa. Unlike Blankenship, who was a hugely successful high school coach in the city, Montgomery brings all the glitter of having called plays at Baylor during the Bears' transformation from laughingstocks to college football titans. Tulsa's horrendous performance the past two seasons might soon be forgotten.

UNLV

Out: Bobby Hauck
In: Tony Sanchez

Consider this a Vegas-style roll of the dice: Sanchez is a high school coach gone wild with an opportunity to hit it big — unless he flames out as so many previous UNLV leaders have. There are only so many Bishop Gorman players Sanchez can land, but that feels like a slight against the man and there's no reason yet to assume he's not prepared for what awaits him. For now, the rest of the Mountain West remains unworried.

WISCONSIN

Out: Gary Andersen
(Barry Alvarez coached bowl game)
In: Paul Chryst

Chryst was offensive coordinator for some of the best Badgers' units on record, but one must ask — is he best-suited as an OC? The Pittsburgh years were uninspiring. Chryst doesn't have the resume of Andersen, let alone that of Bret Bielema or Barry Alvarez. But he's a Madison man, a native and an alum, and after surprisingly losing back-to-back coaches to other college programs, that's worth something.

COACHES ON THE HOT SEAT

You have seen the hirings, what about the impeding firings? Start looking here:

1. Mike London, Virginia — He's 23-38 in five seasons, has had one winning record, has yet to beat Virginia Tech, and has seemed to misplace his offensive playbook. He's recruited well, but other than that ...

2. Norm Chow, Hawaii — Getting a deserved chance at a head coaching job hasn't been all Chow — or the Warriors — hoped it would be as a likely last chapter to a great career. He's 8-29 in three seasons.

3. Paul Rhoads, Iowa State — Rhoads wants to be in Ames — which is much more than can be said of many of his predecessors — and a contract through 2021 provides a measure of protection. The 2-16 record in the Big 12 and season-opening losses to FCS schools in each of the past two seasons ... well, those tell a different story.

4. Tim Beckman, Illinois — He's gone from two to four to six wins in his three seasons with the Illini, so what's the problem? Thing is, you can only count maybe two of those victories as "decent," and the 4-20 conference mark is hard to miss. Any kudos for eking into a bowl game last season was erased by a subsequent loss to Louisiana Tech.

5. Willie Taggart, USF — He had to clean out his coordinators after last season, his second at the school, and that's never a good sign to have to do that so soon. He needs his recruiting advantages to kick in ... right ... about ... now.

6. Kirk Ferentz, Iowa — Hate to put him on the list, but the Hawkeyes missed a golden opportunity last season when they went 7-5 against a once-in-a-generation soft schedule, followed by a blowout bowl loss to Tennessee. Yes, we know his buyout is north of a cool $13 million, but he keeps drifting closer to a breaking point after several seasons of not being particularly relevant.

Others: Larry Fedora, North Carolina; Kevin Wilson, Indiana; Al Golden, Miami; Darrell Hazel, Purdue

SCOPING THE NATION

WHO DOES IT BEST (OR WORST)

Based on 2014 numbers ...

Game pace:

Fastest tempo:
Baylor, 87.5 plays per game

Slowest tempo:
New Mexico, 61.25 plays per game

Based just on number of plays, Baylor's players experienced nearly *four more games* of college football than the Lobos. Do we call that "value" or "a safety issue?"

Longest average game:
Baylor, 3:40

Shortest average game:
Old Dominion, 3:07

Big plays:

Most plays of 20-plus yards:
Marshall, 111

Most plays of 50-plus yards:
Colorado State, 19

Most yards per play:
Marshall, 7.59

Fewest yards per play:
Wake Forest, 3.38

Big paychecks:

Most money per coach:
SEC West; all seven coaches make more than $4 million per year. And yet someone will finish last.

Best coaching staff value (via *USA Today* figures):
Northern Illinois, $116,820 per win (11)

Worst coaching staff value:
Colorado, $2,302,000 per win (2)

Pick 'em:

Best record vs. the spread:
TCU, 11-2

Worst record vs. the spread:
UConn, 2-10

Top 12 Non-Conference Games

1. Oregon at Michigan State, Sept. 12 — Spartans might need to plant some turf monsters in their grass to slow down the Ducks, because none of their defenders did in the second half of last year's game in Eugene.

2. Alabama vs. Wisconsin (Arlington), Sept. 5 — Offseason prayers said by Tide fans: Please don't let us lose back-to-back games to the Big Ten, please don't let us lose back-to-back games to the Big Ten ...

3. Arizona State vs. Texas A&M (Houston), Sept. 5 — College football needs more — much, much more — of Pac-12 vs. SEC action, and this is what we're talking about. ASU's feisty new QB, Mike Bercovici, takes on one who got away from the Devils — A&M's Kyle Allen (Scottsdale).

4. Notre Dame at Clemson, Oct. 3 — Given the location, this ranks as the Irish's toughest test in a season of tough tests. Either team can make a legit playoff run.

5. Michigan at Utah, Sept. 3 — Let's just get this Harbaugh party started.

6. Ohio State at Virginia Tech, Sept. 7 — OSU's title defense begins against the one team that tripped up the Buckeyes last season when J.T. Barrett was still getting his feet wet. Seems like *sooooo* long ago.

7. USC at Notre Dame, Oct. 17 — Steve Sarkisian won his coaching debut in the rivalry last season, and Cody Kessler became the first quarterback to throw five scoring passes in a half against the Irish. ND's D was far from healthy that afternoon, though, and the stakes should be much greater this time around.

8. Oklahoma at Tennessee, Sept. 12 — Young Vols weren't ready last year when they traveled to Norman in September, losing 34-10. Could be a much different story this season.

9. Texas at Notre Dame, Sept. 5 — It's the Longhorns' first trip to South Bend since 1995, and it's going to be in prime time. Let's do this more often, guys.

10. Auburn vs. Louisville (Atlanta), Sept. 5 — Two teams kick the tires on promising quarterbacks, Auburn with Jeremy Johnson and Louisville with, presumably, Reggie Bonnafon.

11. Georgia Tech at Notre Dame, Sept. 19 — Georgia Tech is coming off an 11-win season, and its option attack, fueled by quarterback Justin Thomas, will be a firm test for the Irish defense.

12. Nebraska at Miami, Sept. 19 — It's not your father's Miami-Nebraska game, but we can pretend, can't we?

Oregon vs. Michigan State | Photo by Scott Olmos-USA TODAY Sports

Alabama vs. Auburn | Marvin Gentry-USA TODAY Sports

Top 12 Conference Games

1. Alabama at Auburn, Nov. 28 — You want a College Football Playoff that has quarterfinals? How about one with a round of 16? That's basically what we're looking at here, as it's perfectly likely both teams will be staring at a scenario in which it has to win the Iron Bowl, the SEC title game, a national semifinal and then the championship.

2. Baylor at TCU, Nov. 27 — Let's go back five years. Baylor was coming off 14 consecutive losing seasons since joining the Big 12. TCU was in the Mountain West Conference. What would have been the odds that this matchup would become THE rivalry in the Big 12? This series took a colossal leap forward last season in a 61-58 win for the Bears, a result that ultimately stiff-armed the Horned Frogs right out of the College Football Playoff while not doing enough for Baylor's cred. This rematch should have it all: The highest of stakes, revenge, bitterness ... all played out at neck-cracking speed.

3. Ohio State at Michigan, Nov. 28 — Come for the rivalry, definitely stay for the postgame handshake.

4. Alabama at Georgia, Oct. 3 — First trip Between the Hedges for the Tide since 2008, which was three national titles ago for Nick Saban. Loser here has ample time to regroup for a run at the SEC title game, which is exactly what we expect to happen.

5. USC at Oregon, Nov. 21 — Back on the cross-division schedule after a two-year hiatus, this could be the first of two meetings in a span of three weeks.

6. Florida State at Clemson, Nov. 7 — Tigers QB Deshaun Watson gets a second crack at the 'Noles, who stole one in OT last season in Tallahassee. Winner takes the ACC Atlantic.

7. Michigan State at Ohio State, Nov. 21 — Last we checked, these are still the two best teams in the Big Ten.

8. LSU at Alabama, Nov. 7 — This matchup rarely disappoints. And we'd be happy if this was just half the classic of last year's game. Alabama, after coughing up a late fumble inside the 10, ended up driving for a tying field goal, then went into Lane Kiffin's bag of tricks to complete a 24-yard overtime pass to 304-pound Brandon Greene.

9. Michigan State at Michigan, Oct. 17 — Sparty has won six of the past seven meetings, and this is really the last chance for Big Blue fans to blame the coaching, as in, "We would have won this game if that *bleeping* Hoke had recruited better."

10. TCU at Oklahoma, Nov. 21 — Given the opponent and time of the season, this one has more implications for OU than the Red River Showdown vs. Texas. TCU won 37-33 last season with the help of a late fourth-down stop.

11. Wisconsin at Nebraska, Oct. 10 — Because someone has to win the Big Ten West, and two new coaches really want to do it.

12. Georgia at Auburn, Nov. 14 — Let's see what the Tigers have left in the tank, as this is the end of a four-game stretch that begins at Arkansas, vs. Ole Miss and at Texas A&M.

BONUS: Arizona at Arizona State (Nov. 21), UCLA at USC (Nov. 28): The Pac-12 South isn't quite the SEC West, but it's close, and this late sequence of rivalry games likely will tell the tale.

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Comeback Kids

Here are 15 players ready for launch in 2015 after suffering major injuries in 2014:

Bralon Addison, WR, Oregon — The Ducks made it all the way to the national championship game after being without one of their top playmakers all season. The speedy Addison suffered a torn ACL in the spring of 2014, on the heels of a sophomore season in which he caught 61 passes for 890 yards and seven touchdowns. This spring, he shed plenty of rust.

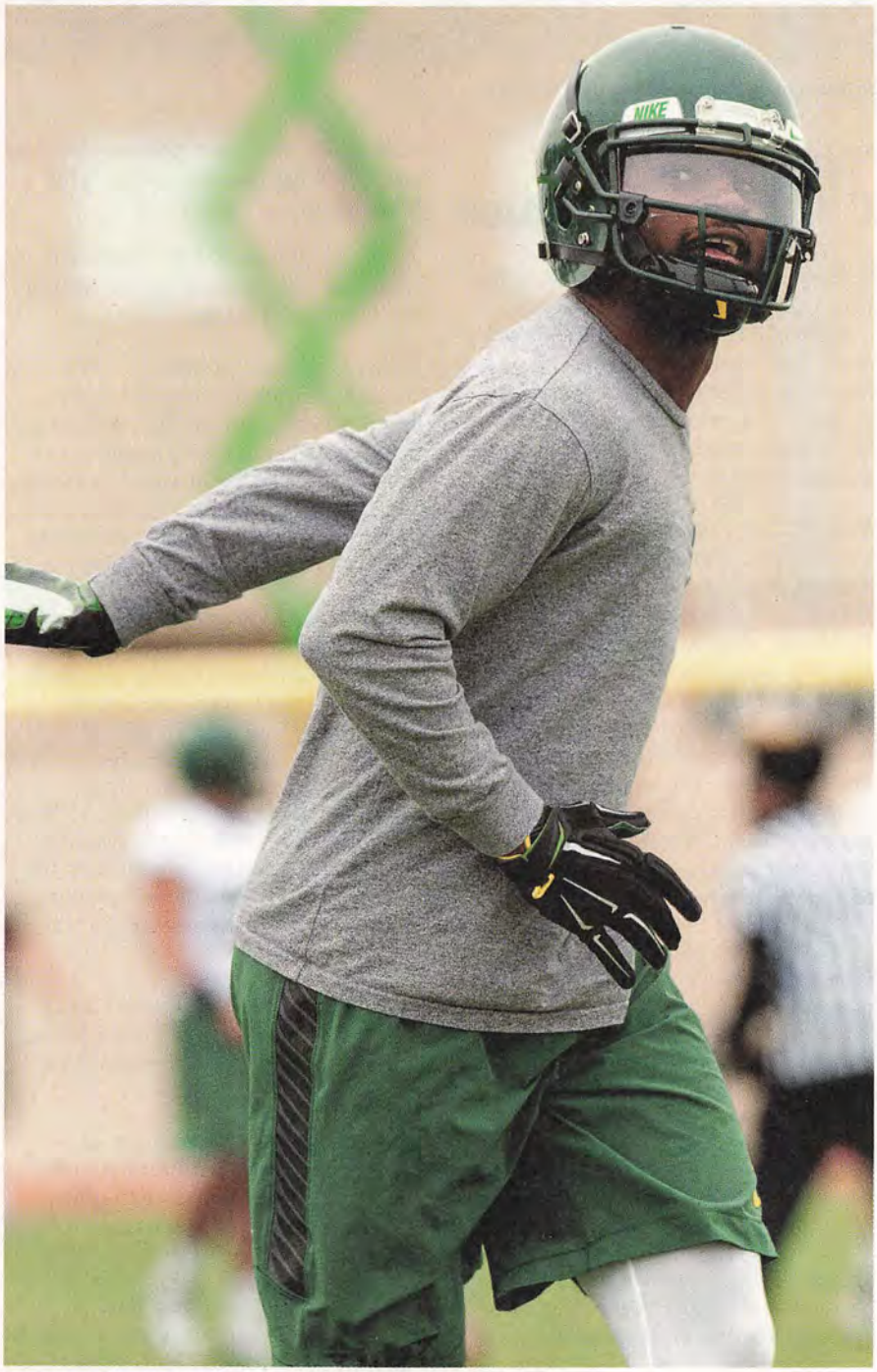
Kenny Bigelow, DT, USC — He was a top-10 recruit in 2013, then redshirted, then tore an ACL last summer during a voluntary workout. Bigelow, expected to be in the rotation in USC's three-man front, was limited to individual work this spring but looked fit at a trimmer 285 pounds. Not everyone can follow his diet, though. He said he lost three pounds just by cutting off his dreadlocks.

Kenyan Drake, RB, Alabama — If you search "Kenyan Drake injury," you'll be directed to a YouTube video that comes with this caution: "WARNING: graphic footage." Yeah. It's not pretty. That gruesome broken leg, suffered Oct. 4 against Ole Miss, cost him the rest of the season, but he was well on his way back to 100 percent in the spring. He's a much-needed second-stringer to Derrick Henry and/or a wideout for Lane Kiffin to use as he sees fit.

Carl Lawson, DE, Auburn — A Freshman All-American in 2013, he suffered a torn ACL last spring and sat out the 2014 season. He was back in a big way this spring for new coordinator Will Muschamp, playing the Buck position, a play-making hybrid defensive end/outside linebacker spot. Basically, the former No. 1-rated high school defensive end will be this year's college football version of Dante Fowler Jr., who manned the Buck for Muschamp last season at Florida. The Tigers' pass rush needs Lawson in a huge way, too; they had a mere 21 sacks last year.

Luther Maddy, DT, Virginia Tech — He played in just the first four games, with nine tackles (and, whoa, still earned honorable mention All-ACC honors from the coaches), but underwent two knee surgeries, the first for torn meniscus. He was third-team All-ACC in 2013, and his return helps give the Hokies perhaps the saltiest defense in the league.

Braxton Miller, QB, Ohio State — The Buckeyes showed last season that they don't *need* Braxton Miller. Of course, they *want* Braxton Miller. But it's going



Oregon Ducks wide receiver Bralon Addison | Photo by Jerome Miron-USA TODAY Sports

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to be tricky, and he was still recovering from shoulder surgery during the spring, and rumors were swirling, and dang these print deadlines ... so, uh, check back at LindysSports.com as news breaks.

Jamal Palmer, DE, Baylor — He played in five games last season before an ACL tear wiped out the rest of his season. The senior, a former honorable mention All-Big 12 pick, is healthy and ready to rejoin a loaded Bears front.

Jabrill Peppers, S, Michigan — Heck of a departing gift left by Brady Hoke. Rated as the No. 3 prospect in the 2014 class by 247Sports, Peppers played in three games last season before injuries piled up and he was able to take a redshirt. Jim Harbaugh will turn him loose all over the field and into the backfield as a multi-purpose weapon, and the coach offered the highest praise at the end of the spring, saying, "He's been A-plus."

Michael Rose-Ivey, LB, Nebraska — He set a school freshman record with 66 tackles in 2013, including 49 in the final five games, but a knee injury in fall camp kept him on the sideline all of last season. He's working at an outside spot for coordinator Mark Banker, one of the best in the business.

Deshaun Watson, QB, Clemson — The college football world is his. We only got a peek at what he could do before an ACL tear shut him down ... but that peek was spectacular. He completed 67.9 percent of his passes (93 of 137) for 1,466 yards, with 14 touchdowns and two interceptions. He added five touchdowns on the ground.

Kelby Brown, LB; Braxton Deaver, TE, Duke — Each suffered ACL tears in August and were subsequently granted a sixth year of eligibility by the NCAA. That's found gold for David Cutcliffe, who gets back an All-ACC linebacker who had 114 tackles, including 11 for loss, in 2013, and a tight end who caught 46 passes for 600 yards that season. Cutcliffe said both should be 100 percent in camp.

Laquon Treadwell, WR; Denzel Nkemdiche, LB; Laremy Tunsil, OT, Ole Miss — Treadwell's goal-line leg fracture was gruesome; Nkemdiche played in just seven games because of a broken ankle; Tunsil suffered a fractured leg in the bowl game. When healthy, all three are among the best in the nation at their positions.

WINNING IN FEBRUARY

The industry standard for team recruiting rankings comes from the 247Sports' Composite, which equally balances the ratings from multiple major services, including, of course, its own.

Since Alabama has been No. 1 in those composite rankings in each of the past five years, we had a pretty good idea which team was going to come out on top once we crunched the numbers for a longer snapshot of signing days, 2011 through 2015. After that, though ... well, let's see what happened.

OK, you have your usual suspects, and note that the top three teams account for the past four national championships. Aha! Recruiting rankings have predictive value! *Who'd a thunk*?

But also note what you don't see. No TCU. No Wisconsin. No Michigan State. There are always exceptions. Wonderful, happy, exceptions.

When it comes to recruiting, we do love our sleeper stories — Arizona linebacker Scooby Wright and Colorado State's Rashard Higgins to name two. Higgins, in the kind of false precision inherent to these kind of rankings, was tabbed as the 176th best receiver in the 2013 class, 175 spots below Laquon Treadwell. Not much difference now, right?

As a prognostication tool, the recruiting rankings often break down on an individual basis — because sometimes guys simply end up as Peaked In High School Rob Lowe — although a group of four- and five-star guys is probably going to end up beating your group of two- and three-stars.

Check out the Top 25 teams for the past five years of recruiting, using the cumulative 247Sports' point value:

RK.	TEAM	POINTS
1.	Alabama	1,558.69
2.	Ohio State	1,438.75
3.	Florida State	1,420.09
4.	LSU	1,387.33
5.	USC	1,382.77
6.	Georgia	1,366.07
7.	Auburn	1,348.05
8.	Florida	1,334.08
9.	Notre Dame	1,327.39
10.	Texas	1,327.18
11.	Clemson	1,283.42
12.	Tennessee	1,267.41
13.	Texas A&M	1,255.40
14.	Oklahoma	1,245.62
15.	Oregon	1,210.39
16.	Michigan	1,204.27
17.	UCLA	1,198.67
18.	South Carolina	1,190.32
19.	Miami	1,185.16
20.	Ole Miss	1,176.85
21.	Stanford	1,139.29
22.	Washington	1,088.52
23.	Nebraska	1,079.10
24.	Virginia Tech	1,071.09
25.	Mississippi State	1,070.01

Nick Saban | Photo by Marvin Gentry-USA TODAY Sports

SCOPING THE NATION

SNEAK PEAK

By the time NFL commissioner Roger Goodell announced the first pick of the 2015 NFL Draft, our pals at NFLDraftScout.com had long been scouting, evaluating, breaking down the next wave of prospects. A year away from the 2016 draft, here is who they had as the top five seniors on their draft board at each major position group. Check out NFLDraftScout.com to see how it changes once the games begin.

Duke Williams | Photo by RD Moore

QUARTERBACK

1. Connor Cook	Michigan State
2. Dak Prescott	Mississippi State
3. Trevone Boykin	TCU
4. Kevin Hogan	Stanford
5. Cody Kessler	USC

RUNNING BACK

1. Devontae Booker	Utah
2. Byron Marshall	Oregon
3. Jonathan Williams	Arkansas
4. Tra Carson	Texas A&M
5. Keith Marshall	Georgia

WIDE RECEIVER

1. Duke Williams	Auburn
2. Josh Doctson	TCU
3. Nelson Spruce	Colorado
4. Quinshad Davis	North Carolina
5. Leonte Carroo	Rutgers

TIGHT END

1. Kyle Carter	Penn State
2. Dillon Gordon	LSU
3. Nick Vannett	Ohio State
4. Darion Griswold	Arkansas State
5. Jay Rome	Georgia

CENTER

1. Max Tuerk	USC
2. Isaac Seumalo	Oregon State
3. Mike Matthews	Texas A&M
4. Nick Martin	Notre Dame
5. Jake Brendel	UCLA

OFFENSIVE GUARD

1. Vadal Alexander	LSU
2. Landon Turner	North Carolina
3. Christian Westerman	Arizona State
4. Cody Whitehair	Kansas State
5. Jordan Rigsbee	California

OFFENSIVE TACKLE

1. Taylor Decker	Ohio State
2. Spencer Drango	Baylor
3. Tyler Johnstone	Oregon
4. Le'Raven Clark	Texas Tech
5. Tyler Marz	Wisconsin

DEFENSIVE END

1. Shawn Oakman	Baylor
2. Shilique Calhoun	Michigan State
3. DeForest Buckner	Oregon
4. Bronson Kaufusi	Brigham Young
5. Charles Tapper	Oklahoma

DEFENSIVE TACKLE

1. Sheldon Day	Notre Dame
2. Adolphus Washington	Ohio State
3. Anthony Zettel	Penn State
4. Antwaun Woods	USC
5. Josh Tupou	Colorado

OUTSIDE LINEBACKER

1. Jordan Jenkins	Georgia
2. Eric Striker	Oklahoma
3. Terrance Smith	Florida State
4. Joshua Perry	Ohio State
5. Dadi Nicolas	Virginia Tech

INSIDE LINEBACKER

1. Reggie Ragland	Alabama
2. Rodney Hardrick	Oregon
3. Cassanova McKinzy	Auburn
4. Kentrell Brothers	Missouri
5. Reggie Northrup	Florida State

CORNERBACK

1. Wayne Lyons	Michigan
2. Fabian Moreau	UCLA
3. Jonathan Jones	Auburn
4. Kevon Seymour	USC
5. Taveze Calhoun	Mississippi State

STRONG SAFETY

1. Jeremy Cash	Duke
2. Karl Joseph	West Virginia
3. Michael Caputo	Wisconsin
4. Kenny Iloka	TCU
5. Isaiah Johnson	South Carolina

FREE SAFETY

1. Jalen Mills	LSU
2. Jamal Golden	Georgia Tech
3. Kodi Whitfield	Stanford
4. Deon Bush	Miami
5. LaDarrell McNeil	Tennessee

NATIONAL PICKS

Photo by: Jerome Miron-USA TODAY Sports

Every reason to expect Urbanites to keep soaring

1. OHIO STATE

It only feels like a hundred years ago when Ohio State — its highest of hopes seemingly dashed by a season-ending injury to star quarterback Braxton Miller — lost at home by two touchdowns to Virginia Tech. Since that unsightly 2014 evening in Columbus, the Buckeyes rallied to greatness behind second- and third-string quarterbacks, repositioned themselves as national giants, and even put a flattering shine on the oft-criticized Big Ten. Indeed, they've merely changed everything.

Isn't it just a reflection of all things Urban Meyer? That this is what Buckeyes had anticipated, even expected, when he stepped into the job just three years ago? No longer does Alabama's Nick Saban stand alone as the king of college football coaches. Meyer is right there at the big bowl, challenging Saban for every kibble. Simply put, OSU is a giant fully awakened.

THE GOOD NEWS: Gosh, where to start? It almost doesn't seem to matter if it's Cardale Jones or J.T. Barrett under center, or even if it's Miller, who might be playing elsewhere when the September 7 opener at Virginia Tech comes. Under any circumstances, that's a rematch from hell for the Hokies. If the Buckeyes do what they utterly expect to do there, the rest should be a matter of a rudimentary equation: Best offensive players in the Big Ten (hello, Ezekiel Elliott) plus best defensive players (nice to see you again, Joey Bosa) equal can't-screw-this-up.

THE BAD NEWS: Did we mention the game at Virginia Tech? Well, it's a bit scary. OSU must play at Michigan, too, and new Wolverines coach Jim Harbaugh was so frighteningly good against top opponents at Stanford, it invites doubt into the picture.

OUR CALL: There won't be a regular-season contest in which the Buckeyes don't have a gigantic edge in — what's that word? — talent. That monumental collection of talent, along with Meyer's eminence, makes No. 1 an easy call.

2. TCU

No longer under the radar

It still has to hurt. TCU was so good last season — so dominant. And yet the Horned Frogs were dissed and dismissed by the College Football Playoff selection committee when it mattered most. Who's to say they wouldn't have given a (much) better showing than, say, Florida State did? But it's water under the bridge now. More important is that TCU has completely overcome its early shyness in the Big 12, and this 2015 bunch could be Patterson's best yet.

THE GOOD NEWS: QB Trevone Boykin is beyond-the-pale great. Does that sound like a little much? Get over it. Boykin could start at any school in the country and either make that team better or, at worst, keep it humming. And he is joined by so many returning starters (10) from a top offense, it's silly. Just as exciting: TCU's defense will roar like it hasn't in a while.

THE BAD NEWS: We're still looking ... maybe it's the tough road schedule? Visits to Minnesota, Kansas State, Oklahoma State and Oklahoma are going to be challenging, but all those games are winnable.

OUR CALL: The committee wouldn't dare rain on an 11-1 TCU parade again, would it? The Frogs — who get Baylor at home in the regular-season finale — have 12-0 potential.

3. ALABAMA

Not quite flush, but still the Tide

So who are the Crimson Tide, anyway? Are they a collection of stud recruits who'll come up short, as in the postseasons of 2013 and 2014? Or are they an angry, ultra-motivated team that will crush every foe in their path, lifting the program, Nick Saban and the entire SEC back to the top of the heap? It could end up somewhere in between, but in between doesn't fly in Tuscaloosa.

THE GOOD NEWS: Will it be Jake Coker under center? Whoever takes the snaps will turn around and see running back Derrick Henry, and all sorts of good things will flow from there. Defensive lineman A'Shawn Robinson and linebacker Reggie Ragland are locked into crush mode for what looks to be a nasty D.

THE BAD NEWS: The Iron Bowl will be played down the road a smidge in Auburn. Yeah, that could be a season-changing sort of deal. Also, offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin will be dealing with an almost entirely new group of starters.

OUR CALL: Hell-lo, this is Bama we're talking about. We feel like maybe we've said that before, but hasn't everybody? A spectacular SEC West division makes for tough sledding, but this is Ala-damn-bama.

4. OREGON

Staying on top even without Mr. Heisman

If the acquisition of Eastern Washington graduate transfer quarterback Vernon Adams is the offseason heist we think it is, the Ducks will be just fine after losing that Heisman kid. Now, of course, Adams still has to show up, win the job over 2014 backup Jeff Lockie, and prove his worth week-to-week at the highest level. What he did to Washington last season — 475 passing yards and seven touchdowns — was a pretty big hint, though.

THE GOOD NEWS: "Big Play VA" was a two-time runner-up for the Walter Payton Award (the Heisman of the FCS). Royce Freeman, Byron Marshall, Thomas Tyner, Bralon Addison, Devon Allen ... the Oregon offense will have, quarterback pending, all the speed and elegance for which it is known.

THE BAD NEWS: Can't pretend that the Oregon defense is elite. Very good, yes. But not elite. The Ducks ducked a Michigan State punch last season in Eugene; doing so in East Lansing will be even tougher.

OUR CALL: By picking them at No. 4, we're probably asking the Ducks to win at Michigan State early in the year or else have to run the table in the Pac-12. Tall order, but we'd have to ask the same of another team, and, well, we trust Oregon.

5. BAYLOR

One more step to elite status

Art Briles and his boys ended the 2014 season in a puddle of "what ifs?" What if the team had showed up ready to rock at West Virginia? What if the massive comeback victory over TCU hadn't taken so long to materialize? What if the playoff committee believed in "one true champion?" What if the Cotton Bowl gag against Michigan State never happened? You get the picture. Baylor is a big-time program, but it still gets in its own way at times.

THE GOOD NEWS: So much talent, there's no way the Bears will fail to compete for a Big 12 title. RB Shock Linwood and receivers KD Cannon and Corey Coleman will have monster seasons. A defense led by freak-of-freaks DL Shawn Oakman is stocked like none Briles has had.

THE BAD NEWS: How good is QB Seth Russell, anyway? Any lingering uncertainty about him will need to be resolved by the brutal November, with Kansas State, Oklahoma State and TCU on the road, and Oklahoma at home.

OUR CALL: There's at least one loss on that schedule along the way, and one loss could be enough to snuff out the playoff chances of a team that — old story — plays absolutely nobody out of conference.

6. MICHIGAN STATE

Tough, physical, strong-willed

It's an interesting time to be a Spartan. Big Ten East mate Ohio State has ascended to a level MSU might not be capable of reaching. Fellow division rival Michigan is on the mega-prowl after hiring Jim Harbaugh as coach. But Mark Dantonio and his program have been overlooked before. Lower the ceiling on Sparty at your own risk.

THE GOOD NEWS: A mentality has been set in East Lansing — in a phrase, it's to kick the unholy crap out of everybody. So take to the bank that Sparty will be tough, physical and strong-willed. It helps that Connor Cook is back at quarterback and that DE Shilique Calhoun still is on hand to make opponents cry for mama.

THE BAD NEWS: It's hard enough that MSU, without former star defensive coordinator Pat Narduzzi, has to face Oregon in an early game, but it's at home. The road schedule includes Michigan, Nebraska and — yikes — Ohio State. Raise your hand if you see the Green Machine swallowing up all those mouthfuls. Nobody? Not us, either.

OUR CALL: Without much doubt, we'll still call this the Big Ten's second-best team. The Spartans can old-school the rest of the Big Ten — other than Ohio State — into submission.

7. Notre Dame

Exorcising own demons is the key

We could argue all day about what was Notre Dame's lowest point in 2014. The heartbreak in Tallahassee? Losing at home to Northwestern? Falling apart at Arizona State? Embarrassing itself at USC? The point is, there were a lot of low points. But a big bounce-back in 2015 would fix everything, and the deep Irish are capable of delivering it.

THE GOOD NEWS: The Irish will be very experienced on both sides. Their offensive line, led by Ronnie Stanley and Nick Martin, will give Malik Zaire — the winner of the quarterback battle over Everett Golson — a chance at a special season. The defense will be strong. Maybe not 2012 strong, but balanced, tough and explosive in the back end.

THE BAD NEWS: There has to be at least some question about the mental toughness of this group, which, when the going got tough a year ago, revealed a startling lack of fortitude. When negativity creeps in at Notre Dame, it can become quite a bad scene.

OUR CALL: Why not the Irish? Why can't they leap into playoff contention? They have the horses to do it. Early results against Texas (home), Georgia Tech (home) and Clemson (road) will speak volumes.

8. AUBURN

Sharpening up their teeth

Over its final five games last season, Auburn — whose only victory in that stretch came against Samford — pretty well surrendered the identity it had formed in reaching the 2013 national title game. The offense was pretty good, of course, but it wasn't a clutch unit. The defense? Not clutch, not opportunistic, not anything good. The immediate challenge for Gus Malzahn and his staff is to set things right again.

THE GOOD NEWS: Speaking of the staff — hello, Will Muschamp, and thank goodness you're here. Muschamp went down in flames as a head coach at Florida, but as a coordinator, he'll put the teeth back in the Tigers' defense. And there might be an overall upgrade from Nick Marshall to Jeremy Johnson at quarterback. Watch out for WR Duke Williams. DE Carl Lawson is ready to roar.

THE BAD NEWS: Williams is the only returning starter in the offensive skill group (although it's not without emerging talent). The secondary could be a particular weakness.

OUR CALL: If the Tigers can survive an opening neutral-site matchup with Louisville and an SEC-opening visit to LSU — huge "if," right? — they'll be in serious contention for the playoff. We like this team to bounce back from last season and peak late.

9. Clemson

Time to overtake FSU

OK, so the whole rivalry thingy with Florida State hasn't been working out that well. What're you gonna do? Actually, this is a great time for Clemson to do something about it. The Tigers aren't strong favorites over FSU in the ACC Atlantic — many would argue they aren't the favorites at all — but they have fewer questions to answer, plus the home field when the teams meet in November.

THE GOOD NEWS: Times are good when you can have the nation's No. 1 defense, as the Tigers did in 2014, and hold on to a star coordinator such as Brent Venables. The offense gets the expected return of quarterback Deshaun Watson from an ACL injury. Only a sophomore, Watson has Heisman potential.

THE BAD NEWS: Former offensive coordinator Chad Morris took the head job at SMU, a significant loss for the Tigers. Jeff Scott and Tony Elliott were promoted to co-coordinators, an arrangement that doesn't always work out. Venables has to coach up several new starters on D.

OUR CALL: When the Tigers visit Louisville in Week 3, it'll be their second game in five days. After that, they'll have two-plus weeks to prep for a huge home test against Notre Dame. Clear those hurdles and a glorious finish will be within reach.

10. GEORGIA

Poised for something big

Crazy thought: How about the Bulldogs don't lose the SEC East to Missouri this season? Or to upstart Tennessee or anybody else? As so often has been the case under Mark Richt, Georgia is — based on talent — the team to beat in the East. If this program had a better history of delivering on its promise, a lot of folks would be picking the Dawgs to win the SEC, and more.

THE GOOD NEWS: Can we talk about Nick Chubb? We love Nick Chubb. We love just saying "Nick Chubb." It fits the stubby-legged ferocity with which he carries the football — the guy is the superstar of what will be one of the nation's premier running games.

THE BAD NEWS: Who's the quarterback? Richt and new offensive coordinator Brian Schottenheimer may need all of training camp to figure that out. Georgia needs a new pair of starting wideouts, too.

OUR CALL: Second-year defensive coordinator Jeremy Pruitt is building a dominant group — a dangerous reality for the rest of the East. Shootouts: bad. Shutouts: good. In Athens this year, the D is the real key.

11. USC

Out of the shadows, back to glory?

It's getting easier to buy into the Trojans, out of the shadows of NCAA sanctions and building back the depth that will allow second-year coach Steve Sarkisian to stomp on the accelerator and shorten the gap back to the glory days of Troy. That those days could actually arrive this very season is a possibility we long considered and can't quite dismiss.

THE GOOD NEWS: Senior Cody Kessler leads the Pac-12's quarterback brigade, which is always a good start. Goodness, some of the talent on this team takes your breath away — safety-turned-linebacker Su'a Cravens, corner/receiver/returner Adoree' Jackson, receiver JuJu Smith — and more of that young talent is washing up in waves.

THE BAD NEWS: Leonard Williams was a monster of a defensive lineman, and USC still has some things to figure out up front when it reconvenes in August. The safety spots are another concern on defense, and incoming freshmen will have a chance to stake out roles in camp.

OUR CALL: Admit it: Most of your questions about 'SC center on the head coach being able to shed his "7-win Sark" label. Same here. The Trojans will zoom past seven and capture the tough Pac-12 South, but ultimately bump up against the Green ceiling (yes, that's Oregon).

12. Florida State

Keying on team-wide accountability

Maybe, in some small way, moving on from the Jameis Winston era is a good thing for the Seminoles. Certainly, the spotlight isn't shining as brightly. But the Winston era was an enormous success on the field, and that'll be an extraordinarily tough act to follow. Have we seen the last of FSU in the playoff mix for a while?

THE GOOD NEWS: Without a singular superstar to bail them out of late-game jams, the 'Noles move forward with a spirit of team-wide accountability. That should be especially motivating for a defense that has top-end speed and, yes, potential in the pass rush. FSU had an ACC-low 17 sacks last season. How does doubling that number sound, fellas?

THE BAD NEWS: That former quarterback was 26-1. Look, FSU just won't be as good without him. And it isn't just Winston who's gone; Fisher and his staff must replace about half their starters from 2014. The offensive line could be a real mess.

OUR CALL: The closer you look at the 'Noles, the harder it is to see pieces of a championship puzzle. But it'll still be hard as heck to beat this team, which has a great shot at its customary double-digit victories.

13. LSU

Approaching crossroads, seeking balance

It was a struggle for the Tigers in 2014, when they finished 8-5 — matching the worst record in Les Miles' 10 years at the school — and were dragged down by an impotent, SEC-worst passing attack. With many of its West division mates soaring, LSU is at a fascinating crossroads. Will Miles' program reassert itself as a true national power?

THE GOOD NEWS: LSU still can line up and knock the slobber out of a defense, as it demonstrated last season with a devastating downhill running game. Brutish back Leonard Fournette is one of the best players in the country, and he'll operate behind a high-quality offensive line that could coalesce into a great unit.

THE BAD NEWS: Excellent defensive coordinator John Chavis left for Texas A&M, which has to stick in Miles' craw. Chavis must be looking forward to facing Tigers' quarterbacks Anthony Jennings and Brandon Harris, who don't scare anybody.

OUR CALL: Why does it seem, year after year, that LSU is particularly up against it in the schedule department? Alas, the Tigers can't worry about that. If they want to stay in the West hunt, they'll just have to out-tough everybody.

14 Arizona State

Going all 'High Octane' again

For as much as quarterback Taylor Kelly did for Arizona State over the past three seasons — he at least earned lifetime holiday cards from coach Todd Graham — we liked the way the offense ran when Mike Bercovici had his audition as an injury-replacement last season. Berco takes over full time now, and even with wideout Jaelen Strong moving on to the NFL, he has multiple live wires to whom he can get the ball, so Graham can go all "High Octane" again.

THE GOOD NEWS: D.J. Foster can get comfortable as a 1,000-yard receiver in the slot because sophomores Kalen Ballage and Demario Richard can handle his old tailback spot. Ballage was super in the spring, doubling (tripling?) as a kick returner, and (here's the fun part) as a third-down pass rusher.

THE BAD NEWS: Graham's defense is one of the best at causing havoc, but he spent the springtime looking for answers at his havoc-causing "Devilbacker" position. An opener vs. Texas A&M in Houston is a either a great opportunity ... or an ice-bucket reality check.

OUR CALL: ASU has posted back-to-back 10-win seasons. That sounds like the ceiling for this season, but a very fine ceiling it would be.

15. Georgia Tech

Schedule tempers optimistic upside

Man alive, did the Yellow Jackets ever open some eyes with their finish in 2014, knocking off Georgia before shredding Mississippi State in a bowl game for their 11th victory. This team certainly ought to be viewed as a serious threat to Clemson and Florida State in the ACC.

THE GOOD NEWS: Dazzling quarterback Justin Thomas is back to run Paul Johnson's triple-option attack, and he mixes in just enough quality with his arm to give any defense fits. Tech's experienced defense should make a strong move up the ACC's statistical rankings.

THE BAD NEWS: Other than Thomas, the cast of skill players on offense will be mostly new. Thomas is the right guy to hold them steady, but it's still a challenging scenario. Also, the schedule: Tech gets both Clemson and FSU in divisional crossover games and must travel to Notre Dame.

OUR CALL: There's enough "bad" above that it'll take everything Tech has to win 11 games again. If it can fight its way to the top of the Coastal, though, the ACC title game will be can't-miss theater.

16. Wisconsin

Chryst back where he belongs

So the Gary Andersen experiment sure turned out to be ... weird. Madison wasn't the place for him, apparently, but it feels like home — literally — to replacement Paul Chryst. He's a Madison native, a UW alum and a former offensive coordinator who skippered some of the Badgers' best offenses.

THE GOOD NEWS: The Badgers will continue to blast away in the run game, with Corey Clement a worthy successor to Montee Ball and Melvin Gordon and — the usual — a wall of giants up front to pave the way. Wisconsin held on to defensive coordinator Dave Aranda, which definitely helps.

THE BAD NEWS: One-dimensional quarterback Joel Stave — big arm, no legs — doesn't allow for as much fun as the Badgers had when that one guy Russell Wilson was QBing for Chryst. Oh, well. The pass-catching crew is pretty run-of-the-mill, and the defense has some rebuilding to do in the front seven.

OUR CALL: We didn't even mention that the Badgers have to open in Arlington, Texas, against — yikes — Alabama. With the stench of last year's 59-0 loss to Ohio State in the Big Ten title game still wafting, there's no way to see a league title happening. But the B1G West is weak.

17. Tennessee

On the rise, but this high? Sure!

Now this is fun. Let's take the Vols — who haven't played above-.500 ball in the SEC since 2007 — and vault them all the way to No. 17? But it's not crazy. This program is building toward something very exciting, and a flying leap to the top of the SEC East isn't at all out of the question.

THE GOOD NEWS: A hundred starters return from last year's 7-6 team. That's a slight exaggeration, but seriously — just about everybody is back, and that makes this a hugely important season in Knoxville. It wouldn't mean nearly as much if the Vols had a sluggo at quarterback, but Josh Dobbs has best-in-the-league potential.

THE BAD NEWS: Tennessee has lost five straight against Georgia and 10 in a row to Florida. There are dragons to slay, and it's more than fair to wonder if the Vols have the wherewithal to do it. The Vols annual crossover game with Alabama won't make things any easier.

OUR CALL: There is no doubt the arrow is pointing up for this program. UT will be a tough out for anybody it plays. Winning the East is unlikely — 0 for 3 vs. Missouri so far, by the way — but the earth is shifting in Knoxville and we're not about to pretend otherwise.

18. Oklahoma State

Bouncing back from aberration

Last season sure was a bummer — Mike Gundy's first foray through a sub-.500 Big 12 campaign since 2006. Geez, Gundy wasn't even 40 then. But now he and his program have a chance to sneak up on the Big 12 all over again. And, of course, Gundy — long rumored to be considering other coaching jobs — remains in Stillwater to see it through.

THE GOOD NEWS: There's lots of it, partly because the Cowboys bring back loads of experience on both sides of the ball. Consider, too, a potentially transformative field general, young Mason Rudolph, who has grabbed the reins of this team as only a born leader can. OSU also gets Kansas State, TCU, Baylor and Oklahoma — in that order — at home.

THE BAD NEWS: OSU was far behind the curve in turnover margin last season, which simply can't be repeated if this team is going to contend in the Big 12. Are there enough playmakers on defense? Is there enough discipline on offense? Gundy and his staff are under the gun to coach their boys up.

OUR CALL: A sudden move to the top of the Big 12 is possible here. We're not simply talking about improvement — a league title could happen. But nobody says it'll be easy.

19. Arizona

Margin of error remains slim

Rich Rodriguez coaxed 10 regular-season victories, a Pac-12 South title and a spot in a Big Six bowl out of Arizona last season. RichRod has settled into the Southwest comfortably — "Palm trees and sunshine ... are you kidding me?" he says with a smile — and he really is just getting started as he enters his fourth season. Not every year is going to be 2014, but it's reasonable to place the Wildcats in the annual Top 25 discussion for the foreseeable future.

THE GOOD NEWS: The team's best player — all-everything linebacker Scooby Wright — is also the team's hardest worker. On offense, Arizona has hit the skill-position trifecta with QB Anu Solomon, RB Nick Wilson and WR Cayleb Jones.

THE BAD NEWS: As practical matters, the defense needs more playmakers around Wright and the offensive line is replacing three starters. Mostly, though, you wonder if Arizona can come close to replicating its 6-1 record last season in games decided by seven points or less.

OUR CALL: The team's all-around depth is still lacking. With that, it's a bit much to expect Arizona to successfully tip-toe to another South title while playing 12 consecutive games without a bye.

20. UCLA

A fork in the road awaits

Let's just go ahead and say it: We're not quite sure what to do with UCLA. This will be coach Jim Mora's most talented roster, top to bottom, and that comes on the heels of a 10-win season. If you tell us the Bruins are top-10 timber in your preseason rankings, we'll shrug and nod and say, "OK." Others might see disaster as UCLA is almost certainly going to go with a true freshman at quarterback. We're putting the Bruins at No. 20, splitting the difference.

THE GOOD NEWS: UCLA's defense is strong up the middle with interior linemen Kenny Clark and Eddie Vanderdoes, and ultra-athletic in the back with corners Ishmael Adams and Fabian Moreau. RB Paul Perkins (1,575 yards last season) charges behind a now grown-up offensive line.

THE BAD NEWS: Everybody loves Josh Rosen. Arguably the nation's top QB recruit, he enrolled early and impressed enough in the spring to consider adding a letter to the stadium name. Get it? From Rose Bowl to Rosen Bowl. (Too soon?). True freshman QBs, though, usually do true freshman things.

OUR CALL: We'll know soon in the conference season which way this is going. UCLA opens at Arizona, then is home to Arizona State in tone-setting South division games.

21. Oklahoma

In search of missing mojo

What the heck happened? We're still trying to make sense of the Sooners' fade in 2014. A 4-0 start to a 4-5 finish (that's 8-5 overall) was beyond unacceptable. The 40-6 loss to Clemson in the Citrus Bowl was absolutely humiliating. Yet, why can't we quit OU?

THE GOOD NEWS: Last season is over. The pressure that was on a popular pick for the first College Football Playoff has waned. And — oh, yes — the Sooners may be pretty close to great offensively in 2015. The addition of young, exciting coordinator Lincoln Riley could spark a positive shift in Norman. Trevor Knight will be a quarterback reborn, unless bigger-armed transfer Baker Mayfield gets the nod (good chance). Either guy will be honored to hand the pigskin to studly back Samaje Perine.

THE BAD NEWS: Did you watch the Sooners sleep-walk through their losses last season? There's something missing from this program. Call it the fire to win the big one. That just doesn't look good on Bob Stoops.

OUR CALL: There just seems to be more urgency at TCU and Baylor. At Texas, too. The Sooners have the horses, but the mojo this squad brings into 2015 isn't impressive.

22. Boise State

Rugged September offers possibilities

There's no better bet than Boise to rise from the minor leagues of college football and shake up the playoff picture in 2015. Unfortunately for the Broncos, though, the out-of-conference slate is tougher than tough. Bryan Harsin will have to channel his best Chris Petersen to make this thing work on a grand scale.

THE GOOD NEWS: The list of returning starters is almost unending. From the O-line to most of the offensive skill guys to every level of the defense, BSU is in rock-solid shape. That'll go a long way in September matchups with Washington, BYU and Virginia.

THE BAD NEWS: The quarterback position is unsettled, and that's putting it lightly. The Broncos will go through fall camp with picking a starting QB as the No. 1 priority. It seems like forever since this team had the comfort of do-everything-right Kellen Moore to lean on. Ryan Finley could be the guy, but he's far from an automatic answer, and his spring arrest did not help.

OUR CALL: If we thought of BSU as a rip-through-the-Mountain-West sort of team, we'd rank it higher. More likely, there's a loss or two laying in wait, even if they get through the gauntlet of September. And that means the playoff will be reserved for the big conference boys. As usual.

23. Texas A&M

On the lookout for consistency

Noteworthy, isn't it, that the Aggies seemed more distracted and more bought into their own hype after Johnny Manziel left than they were when he was still around? A 5-0 start in 2014 had A&M looking like a playoff contender. The five defeats that followed were, collectively, galling. Just how real-deal is this team and program? Therein lies the problem of playing in the SEC West — the margin of error is almost imperceptible.

THE GOOD NEWS: Kevin Sumlin's offense will put up points. There is quality and depth at receiver and running back, and Kyle Allen is a steady performer at quarterback. And the addition of defensive coordinator John Chavis has everyone stoked, since a bolstered defense portends the consistency that this program sorely needs.

THE BAD NEWS: The physical play up front in the SEC continues to be tremendously challenging for A&M. Are the Aggies tough enough to line up against Arkansas in September, for example, and deal with a hellacious rushing attack? Chavis will have to work miracles just to get his defense near the middle of the pack in the league.

OUR CALL: Contention in the SEC West is too much to hope for. But with a relatively soft league schedule, A&M can step forward from last year's 8-5 record, which would represent meaningful progress and overall success.

24. Virginia Tech

Beamer Ball seeking big bounce

College football can be mighty strange — case in point, the 2014 Hokies, who were good enough to win by 14 at Ohio State, soaring in the national rankings for their efforts, yet bad enough to then lose six of their next nine games. That's three straight seasons now in which the Hokies have been run-of-the-mill. The words "Beamer Ball" never sounded more hollow ... but, sigh, we're beginning to fall for this defense all over again.

THE GOOD NEWS: According to Beamer, his players have accepted responsibility for the program's recent dip and shown tremendous resolve to turn things around. Sometimes, attitude is everything. The Hokies repeatedly seemed to cave in tough spots last season — and in the two before that — which obviously can't continue.

THE BAD NEWS: Will the offense again be bogged down by QB Michael Brewer's turnover issues? Is a young offensive line nearly good enough to support Brewer's hoped-for improvement?

OUR CALL: We're not about to see six losses again, but three or four of them seems likely. The opener at home against Ohio State — probably unwinnable — will be good preparation for the rest of the season.

25. Missouri

Showing that they're no fluke

Who's foolish enough to overlook a Tigers program that has jumped up and snapped back-to-back SEC East division titles out of thin air? Mizzou — simply better coached, perhaps, and certainly better at executing — has frustrated the heck out of its new conference rivals in the process. Why not do it again?

THE GOOD NEWS: There's continuity at the most important spot on the field, quarterback, where Maty Mauk has embodied greater-than-the-sum-of-his-parts effectiveness. A veteran offensive line will give Mauk a chance to break in a new batch of skill players. The defense needs new pass rushers, but since when have the Tigers struggled to dial up pressure?

THE BAD NEWS: Gary Pinkel has enjoyed a run of strong players who were hungry to be developed into standouts, and one can never take such a thing for granted. The Tigers seemingly are thin at receiver and along the defensive front. Any drop-off will be felt acutely in the rugged SEC.

OUR CALL: A third straight appearance in the SEC title game feels like a reach, but we're done stuffing Mizzou in the also-ran box. Without a lot of national fanfare, Pinkel has built quite the well-oiled machine.

RATING THE TEAMS 1-128

1. Ohio State	Big Ten	1	6. Michigan State	Big Ten	2	11. USC	Pac-12	2	16. Wisconsin	Big Ten	3	21. Oklahoma	Big 12	4
2. TCU	Big 12	1	7. Notre Dame	Ind	1	12. Florida State	ACC	2	17. Tennessee	SEC	5	22. Boise State	MW	1
3. Alabama	SEC	1	8. Auburn	SEC	2	13. LSU	SEC	4	18. Oklahoma State	Big 12	3	23. Texas A&M	SEC	6
4. Oregon	Pac-12	1	9. Clemson	ACC	1	14. Arizona State	Pac-12	3	19. Arizona	Pac-12	4	24. Virginia Tech	ACC	4
5. Baylor	Big 12	2	10. Georgia	SEC	3	15. Georgia Tech	ACC	3	20. UCLA	Pac-12	5	25. Missouri	SEC	7

No.	Team	Conf.	Conf. Rank	
26.	Stanford	Pac-12	6	All the usual toughness, plus emerging RB Christian McCaffrey.
27.	Arkansas	SEC	8	Defense came on late, and you know Hogs are going to run, run, run.
28.	Ole Miss	SEC	9	Talented enough to be Top 10, but QB play is the BIG question.
29.	Michigan	Big Ten	4	This fixer-upper won't take long after team went 46-42 post-Lloyd Carr.
30.	Nebraska	Big Ten	5	Mike Riley hoping to end 7-year run of four-loss records, in a good way.
31.	Mississippi State	SEC	10	QB Dak Prescott tries to recapture magic of 2014 as a senior.
32.	Utah	Pac-12	7	Utes shouldn't slide after posting a 9-4 record a season ago.
33.	NC State	ACC	5	QB Jacoby Brissett is why NC State will improve on 3-5 ACC mark.
34.	Texas	Big 12	5	After cleaning house in 6-7 debut, Charlie Strong will see progress.
35.	Louisville	ACC	6	Nothing set, but QB Reggie Bonnafon made strong spring claim for job.
36.	West Virginia	Big 12	6	Beat Baylor, lost to TCU by 1. Mountaineers will be a tough out again.
37.	North Carolina	ACC	7	Talented QB Marquise Williams gives Heels edge on middle of Coastal.
38.	Florida	SEC	11	You know Gators will play D; coach Jim McElwain has to goose the O.
39.	Duke	ACC	8	New QB, but Duke has some staying power after 19 wins in two years.
40.	Memphis	AAC	1	Tigers' amazing turnaround continues, led by QB Paxton Lynch.
41.	Penn State	Big Ten	6	Too many INTs for Christian Hackenberg in Lions' 7-6 season.
42.	Cincinnati	AAC	2	Gunner Kiel and crew go to Memphis, BYU, Houston; host the 'Canes.
43.	Kansas State	Big 12	7	Bill Snyder always finds a way to win, but Cats won't reach 9 this year.
44.	Cal	Pac-12	8	QB Jared Goff has great group of WRs; anyone here play D?
45.	Bowling Green	MAC	1	Loads of offense will propel Falcons to third MAC title in three years.
46.	BYU	Ind	2	So much depends on health of QB Taysom Hill, RB Jamaal Williams.
47.	Texas Tech	Big 12	8	Patrick Mahomes or Davis Webb? That's main QB question for TT.
48.	Iowa	Big Ten	7	Kirk Ferentz is feeling heat; his Hawkeyes are running uphill this season.
49.	South Carolina	SEC	12	Doesn't seem to have enough difference-makers to be SEC factor.
50.	Minnesota	Big Ten	8	Gophers lose key skill from 8-5 team; need steadier QB play.
51.	Northern Illinois	MAC	2	Going for sixth straight MAC West division championship.
52.	UCF	AAC	3	Taking step back after going 15-1 in league play the past two years.
53.	Pitt	ACC	9	Mr. Defense, Pat Narduzzi, has a couple of great offensive weapons.
54.	Miami	ACC	10	QB Brad Kaaya played beyond his years as a freshman last season.
55.	Houston	AAC	4	Cougs snapped up QB guru Tom Herman from Ohio State to be HC.
56.	Washington	Pac-12	9	Huskies working through QB issues, loss of NFL talent on defense.
57.	Boston College	ACC	11	Eagles have to rebuild the O-line, but can hover at 7 wins again.
58.	Rutgers	Big Ten	9	Big Ten's most physical teams pushed newbie Rutgers last season.
59.	Kentucky	SEC	13	School investing in football program, and there are signs of life.
60.	Washington State	Pac-12	10	QB Luke Falk impressed as injury replacement, but job remains open.
61.	Maryland	Big Ten	10	Terps broke even in first Big Ten season, but defense will need work.
62.	Navy	AAC	5	Led by fabulous QB Keenan Reynolds, Mids join the AAC this year.
63.	Virginia	ACC	12	Could be a crossroads season for sixth-year coach Mike London.
64.	Oregon State	Pac-12	11	Long term: Gary Andersen is great hire. Short term: Who's the QB?
65.	Utah State	MW	2	Aggies, led by fine linebackers, will be main threat to Boise State.
66.	Illinois	Big Ten	11	Can't catch a break: WR Mike Dudek suffered torn ACL in spring.
67.	Colorado	Pac-12	12	More competitive last season, but hard to climb Pac-12 South ladder.
68.	Temple	AAC	6	Great defense returns every starter from a team that went 6-6.
69.	Northwestern	Big Ten	12	Cats will have to solve issues at QB and on the offensive line in camp.
70.	Indiana	Big Ten	13	Can't replace RB Tevin Coleman; a healthy QB Nate Sudfeld would help.
71.	San Diego State	MW	3	Donnel Pumphrey ran for 1,867 yards and 20 TDs last season.
72.	Toledo	MAC	3	Shocking, we know: Rockets have some top-notch skill players.
73.	Syracuse	ACC	13	No easy fixes for an offense that was to blame for a 3-9 season.
74.	Western Kentucky	C-USA	1	QB Brandon Doughty returns to lead veteran unit.
75.	Colorado State	MW	4	Hiring SEC coordinator worked once; Rams try again with Mike Bobo.
76.	Vanderbilt	SEC	14	Derek Mason hopes to hit his groove after tough 3-8 first season.
77.	East Carolina	AAC	7	QB Shane Carden and WR Justin Hardy don't play here anymore.

No.	Team	Conf.	Conf. Rank	
78.	Wake Forest	ACC	14	Deacs went 3-9 but beat Virginia Tech, which beat Ohio State.
79.	Purdue	Big Ten	14	Offensive line provides some help of getting more than one B1G win.
80.	Iowa State	Big 12	9	Cyclones trying to avoid third consecutive season-opening loss to FCS.
81.	Marshall	C-USA	2	Herd has supporting talent, but losing QB Rakeem Cato is big.
82.	Kansas	Big 12	10	Ex-A&M assistant David Beaty will need all of his recruiting mojo.
83.	Louisiana Tech	C-USA	3	Florida transfer QB Jeff Driskel gets a second chance.
84.	Fresno State	MW	5	Lots of rebuilding for Bulldogs, who won weak MW West, but were 6-8.
85.	Appalachian St.	Sun Belt	1	Looking to win the league in only its second season in the league.
86.	Arkansas State	Sun Belt	2	Offense, led by QB Fredi Knighten, will lead the Wolves' way.
87.	Air Force	MW	6	Falcons won't win 10 again, but talented backfield is a plus.
88.	USF	AAC	8	Willie Taggart just 6-18 in his two seasons with South Florida.
89.	Central Michigan	MAC	4	John Bonamego is handed the reins to his first head coaching job.
90.	Middle Tennessee	C-USA	4	QB Austin Grammer must cut turnovers for Blue Raiders to make a run.
91.	Rice	C-USA	5	Owls could win the West, especially with home game vs. La. Tech.
92.	Ohio	MAC	5	Bobcats fell to 6-6 last season, but they have 17 starters returning.
93.	Georgia Southern	Sun Belt	3	Defending Sun Belt champs; nearly beat G-Tech, NC State last year.
94.	UTEP	C-USA	6	Trending up: Had winning record last year for 1st time since 2005.
95.	Louisiana	Sun Belt	4	Cajuns are working on four consecutive 9-4 records.
96.	Western Michigan	MAC	6	Schedule includes Michigan State, Ohio State and all the MAC bullies.
97.	San Jose State	MW	7	Nice offense, but Spartans will have tough time stopping ground game.
98.	FIU	C-USA	7	Offense could come through, but FIU seems stuck in C-USA middle.
99.	Wyoming	MW	8	Second-year coach Craig Bohl needs more time to bring in the horses.
100.	Buffalo	MAC	7	New coach Lance Leipold went 109-6 at Div. III Wisconsin-Whitewater.
101.	Texas State	Sun Belt	5	Has offense to be reckoned with as Bobcats push for postseason.
102.	Tulane	AAC	9	Spotty offense must improve for Green Wave to improve on 3-9 mark.
103.	New Mexico	MW	9	Lobos completed just 76 passes last year; only Army, Navy had fewer.
104.	Old Dominion	C-USA	8	QB Taylor Heinke is gone, but RB Ray Lawry will lead way on ground.
105.	Kent State	MAC	8	Good news: 2013 leading rusher Trayion Durham is back after '14 injury.
106.	Akron	MAC	9	Influx of transfers could help Zips find way after five-win season.
107.	Nevada	MW	10	Three-way quarterback race could spill over into the season.
108.	South Alabama	Sun Belt	6	Program infused with transfers via UAB, including QB Cody Clements.
109.	Florida Atlantic	C-USA	9	QB Jaquez Johnson and improved run defense are two good things.
110.	North Texas	C-USA	10	Mean Green won't make much headway, if any, from a 4-8 season.
111.	UConn	AAC	10	Huskies hit bottom — they hope — with a two-win season in 2014.
112.	SMU	AAC	11	This will at least be fun to watch with coach Chad Morris taking over.
113.	Southern Miss	C-USA	11	Once-proud program has four wins in the past two seasons.
114.	Tulsa	AAC	12	Former Baylor play-caller Phil Montgomery is the new head coach.
115.	UMass	MAC	10	Minutemen lose their QB, and their TE left early to try the NFL.
116.	Army	Ind	3	Black Knights replacing every starter in triple-option backfield.
117.	Louisiana-Monroe	Sun Belt	7	QB remains an issue, and the running game won't be a savior.
118.	UNLV	MW	11	Worth a try: Local high school coach Tony Sanchez takes over.
119.	Ball State	MAC	11	Inexperience at QB and RB will limit Ball State's ceiling.
120.	Hawaii	MW	12	Three seasons of Norm Chow as coach has resulted in only 8 wins.
121.	Miami (Ohio)	MAC	12	Chuck Martin went 2-10 in first season, but played several games close.
122.	UTSA	C-USA	12	Roadrunners missed chance to be good last year; hello, rebuilding.
123.	Idaho	Sun Belt	8	Streak of three 1-win seasons in a row will end ... and in a good way.
124.	Troy	Sun Belt	9	Program in a rough patch, with no bowl game since 2010.
125.	Eastern Michigan	MAC	13	Only 11 starters back from a team that was 2-10 a season ago.
126.	Georgia State	Sun Belt	10	Will show improvement after going winless in Sun Belt last season.
127.	New Mexico St.	Sun Belt	11	Not much hope if young, small defense remains one of nation's worst.
128.	Charlotte	C-USA	13	Only been playing football since 2013, so 49ers will take some lumps.

NATIONAL RECRUITING

National Top 25
By Barton Simmons

1. Alabama

For the unprecedented fifth consecutive year, Alabama landed the No. 1 class in the country and this time around Nick Saban did it with six 247Sports Composite five-stars, more than any other program. He also did it with a diverse geographical mix.

Calvin Ridley out of Fort Lauderdale was the nation's top receiver and the highest ranked player for the Tide at No. 11 overall. **Blake Barnett** comes in as the nation's No. 2 pro-style quarterback all the way from southern California. The Tide landed two of the top five cornerbacks with **Kendall Sheffield** out of Texas and **Minkah Fitzpatrick** out of New Jersey, both five-stars as well. More running back reinforcements are also on the way with the No. 1 running back in the country — **Damien Harris** — picking Alabama over his home-state Wildcats of Kentucky.

Even despite all of those elite skill players, the strength of this version of No. 1 for Alabama may be on the offensive interior. One year after bringing in a lot of edge tackle talent, Alabama brought in the nation's best crop of interior linemen with four of the nation's top 20 offensive guards. Included in that group is **Dallas Warmack**, the younger brother of current Tennessee Titan Chance Warmack. In addition, **Richie Petitbon** and **Lester Cotton** are the nation's fifth and fourth ranked guards respectively.

2. USC

For the second consecutive year, Steve Sarkisian had a near perfect finish to his recruiting class and this time it nearly resulted in the nation's top class. USC finished No. 2 by the narrowest of margins in the history of modern recruiting so this class features plenty of No. 1 characteristics.

Among those characteristics, USC was able to land the No.1 cornerback in the country according to 247Sports Composite in **Iman "Biggie" Marshall**. Marshall is the No. 4 player overall and committed to the Trojans on National Signing Day in a music video. Marshall was joined on Signing Day with announcements from five-star defensive tackle **Rasheem Green** and Top100 linebacker **John Houston** for USC. Houston is part of the top linebacking class in the country.

In addition to the long, athletic Houston, USC signed the two best players in Utah, both elite linebackers. **Porter Gustin** was the No. 4 outside linebacker in the country and at 6-5, 245 pounds, he could play almost any position on the field. **Osa Masina** was the No. 3 linebacker in the country and can do it all on either side of the ball as well.

Other highlights of the class include the nation's No. 1 offensive guard, **Chuma Edoga,** choosing USC all the way from Georgia, as well as two four-star Army All-American quarterbacks in **Ricky Town** and **Sam Darnold**. In total, USC had 11 U.S. Army All-American's in 2015.

3. Florida State

Even as talented as Florida State's roster has become under Jimbo Fisher, this 2015 class has several players that could see the field immediately for the Seminoles and no one is more ready than five-star safety **Derwin James**. At 6-2, 201 pounds, James is athletically gifted as any skill player in the nation for the class of 2015 and good enough to compete for a starting job as a true freshman.

Just as talented, though maybe not as college ready, is Virginia native **Josh Sweat** who brings as much edge athleticism as any pass-rusher in the country. Sweat and James are two of the four five-stars heading to Tallahassee, with the other two being big-bodied athletic wide receiver **George Campbell** and 6-3 cornerback **Tarvarus McFadden**.

The quarterback position was well-addressed for Florida State as well as Jimbo Fisher looks to add depth following the departure of Jameis Winston to the NFL. **Deondre Francois** was the No. 3 pro-style quarterback in the country and **De'Andre Johnson** was one of the state of Florida's most productive quarterbacks over the last four years.

Other major talents who should be factors down the road for Florida State include Top100 offensive tackle **Abdul Bello**, a 6-6, 295-pound mammoth talent, as well as running back **Jacques Patrick,** who at 6-2, 230-pounds can step in to provide a powerful complement to Dalvin Cook.

4. Tennessee

While the verdict is still out as to what kind of success Butch Jones can bring to Tennessee on the field, all doubt is gone as to what Jones can do on the recruiting trail. Jones upped his 2014 Top 10 class with a Top 5 finish in 2015, and he did it while addressing all the remaining talent voids on the current roster.

While the 2014 class was heavy on skill talent, 2015 brings some of the best line of scrimmage prospects in the country to Knoxville and five-star defensive tackle **Kahlil McKenzie** out of California leads the way. McKenzie at 6-3, 354 pounds will be a force on the defensive line for the Vols, eating up blockers and affecting the entire defense. Also on the line of scrimmage will be Nashville native **Kyle Phillips,** who emerged as one of the nation's top defensive linemen late in the process. He will complement Derek Barnett nicely. Four-star offensive tackles **Drew Richmond** and **Jack Jones** were the two best offensive linemen in Tennessee and should immediately bolster the offensive front as well.

Another area that Tennessee needed to add talent was at quarterback and with the additions of **Jauan Jennings**, **Quinten Dormady** and **Sheriron Jones**, the Vols are landing a rare class of three four-star quarterbacks. To top it off, Tennessee got the No. 2 junior college prospect in the country, former Alabama running back **Alvin Kamara**. We expect Kamara to impact the Tennessee offense immediately.

5. LSU

In recent years, LSU has come to be known as a destination for elite defensive back and running back talent and that holds true in the 2015 class for the Tigers. **Kevin Toliver II**, out of Jacksonville, continues LSU's tradition of big, athletic cornerbacks, bringing his 6-2 frame to Baton Rouge as the No. 2 cornerback in the nation. New Orleans native **Donte Jackson** doesn't have that kind of size, at 5-11, but he has unmatched speed and athleticism. He'll join Toliver in that always talented defensive backfield.

At running back, LSU has accumulated three Top247 backs, all with the size and power that has become the standard in Death Valley. **David Ducre** (5-11/238), **Derrius Guice** (5-11/213) and **Nick Brossette** (6-0/210) are all elite next-level prospects that can run through or around defenses.

Tyron Johnson brings size to the Tigers as well, but he brings it to the outside as a wide receiver. If LSU can find some quarterback play, Johnson should be a dynamic threat on the outside under Cam Cameron. The protection should be there. You won't find two better-looking offensive line prospects than 6-6, 305 pound **Chidi Valentine-Okeke** and 6-4.5, 340-pound guard **Maea Teuhema**.

6. Georgia

In a year that was absolutely loaded with big-time defensive line talent, the best of the bunch was south Georgia monster **Trent Thompson**. Thompson and his No. 1 ranking nationally stayed in state, signing with Georgia and ensuring that Mark Richt would bring home a Top 10 class for the second straight year.

Along with Thompson, Georgia added the No. 5 strongside defensive end (**Jonathan Ledbetter**) and the No. 5, 8, 9 and 15th ranked weakside defensive ends (**Natrez Patrick, D'Andre Walker, Chauncey Rivers, Michael Barnett**). With outside linebacker **Roquan Smith** added to the mix, defensive coordinator Jeremy Pruitt's front seven should be in great hands moving forward.

One of the most college-ready players to join the Georgia roster will be Columbia (Tenn.) Central tight end **Jackson Harris**. The 6-6, 250-pound prospect is not only an athletic pass catcher, but he's willing and able to block in the run game as well. While he may not be quite the college-ready talent that Harris is, **Terry Godwin** is a name to know as well. As versatile and athletic as any prospect in the country, Godwin is the nation's top athlete and can play either side of the ball in Athens.

7. Ohio State

While the significant bump from their national championship run should come in the 2016 class, Urban Meyer and the Buckeyes did plenty of work in 2015 to position themselves for several more runs at a title.

After a season in which three quarterbacks played at All-American levels for Ohio State, it's only fitting that two more four-stars are on their way to Columbus. Fort Lauderdale native **Torrance Gibson** may be the most athletic quarterback in the country and will be a great fit for Urban Meyer's offense, but there weren't many quarterbacks anywhere in the country that were more efficient and productive than in-state four-star **Joe Burrow**. Between the two, the depth at the position just keeps piling under Urban Meyer.

We love the way Ohio State evaluated at the defensive back position with guys like **Denzel Ward** and **Joshua Norwood** being stowaway players that can develop into NFL-type talents as they get bigger and stronger. The same can be said at offensive line. Ohio State recruited mass, size and upside up front with 6-9, 305-pounder **Kevin Feder** being the biggest and Army All-American guard **Matthew Burrell** being maybe the most physically ready.

At linebacker, the nation's No. 2 outside linebacker **Justin Hilliard** is joined by the No. 4 athlete in the country **Jerome Baker** as athletic front-seven talents, but the best of the class may be Cleveland St. Ignatius defensive end **Dre'Mont Jones** who was a standout in the U.S. Army All-American Game.

8. Clemson

Quietly Clemson has established itself as one of the top recruiting programs in the country under Dabo Swinney and the 2015 effort was as strong as any for the Tigers. With the No. 2 wide receiver in the country in **Deon Cain** and the No. 7 athlete in the country in **Ray Ray McCloud III**, Clemson has continued its incredible success recruiting elite skill players out of Florida, but the Tigers expanded to new territory as well with the signing of five-star defensive tackle **Christian Wilkins** out of Connecticut.

More regionally, Clemson found success in Georgia with **Mitch Hyatt**, the No. 2 offensive tackle in the country, and **Austin Bryant,** the No. 12 weakside defensive end. It also won a battle or two with rival South Carolina, most notably for defensive back **Mark Fields**. Fields was one of the top commits in South Carolina's 2015 class before decommitting and choosing the Tigers.

Out of Virginia, linebacker **Chad Smith** is one of the most athletic defenders in the entire class regardless of position, and **Clelin Ferrell** is a 6-5 edge-rusher to complement Wilkins in the middle.

Clemson looks all set at quarterback for a couple of years with **Deshaun Watson** under center, but that should give super-productive in-state talent **Kelly Bryant** some time to develop. At 6-4, 200-plus pounds with athleticism, Bryant has the tools.

9. Auburn

A late recruiting push buoyed by the arrival of defensive coordinator Will Muschamp helped push the Tigers into the national Top 10 on Signing Day — and much of that push was thanks to a strong close in the state of Florida. Within that close, Auburn signed Seffner (Fla.) Armwood defensive end **Byron Cowart**, the No. 3 player in the country and No. 1 weakside defensive end. Cowart is also the first guy you want walking off the bus on any team.

Along with Cowart, Auburn's late surge in the state of Florida included pickups from a phenomenal pass-rushing outside linebacker in **Jeffery Holland**, a dynamic slot receiver in **Ryan Davis** and one of the fastest prospects in the nation in two-way threat **Javarius Davis**.

Cowart is as college ready as anyone in the country, but Auburn also landed a prospect that has as much or more upside than any other prospect in the country. **Prince Tega Wanogho Jr.** is 6-8, 250 pounds, with elite athleticism, who is only one year in to the sport of football. He reclassified late from the class of 2016 to the class of 2015. The defensive end is the kind of physical freak that could develop into a Shawn Oakman-type of talent down the line.

Five-star junior college running back **Jovon Robinson**, Top100 athlete **Kerryon Johnson**, and athletic in-state linebacker **Richard McBryde** are all headline-worthy signees as well that could be early playing-time types.

10. Texas

After Texas A&M began to take the state away from the Longhorns over the past two years on the recruiting trail, Charlie Strong reclaimed some footing in 2015. One of the biggest turning points for Texas was the commitment of five-star linebacker **Malik Jefferson**, the best outside linebacker in the 2015 class and a freakish athlete. A longtime Texas A&M lean, Jefferson symbolized a turning point for Texas and it foreshadowed a slew of big-time in-state pickups late.

After Jefferson's commitment, a flurry of late pickups followed. Four-star Dallas linebacker **Anthony Wheeler** joined Jefferson to form one of the more athletic linebacker duos in the country. **Holton Hill** and **Kris Boyd** are two of the best in-state defensive backs in the 2015 class, and **Chris Warren** is a 6-2, 240-pound running back that happens to have elite speed as well.

Quarterback continues to be a point of emphasis for Charlie Strong and offensive coordinator Shawn Watson and the 2015 class saw the Longhorns steal Florida State commit **Kai Locksley** to answer that question.

Strong also dipped into his old Florida stomping ground to land four elite prospects led by Tallahassee wide receiver **John Burt**, the No. 14 wideout in the nation.

11. Texas A&M

The Aggies just missed out on another Top 10 class but still managed to hit on some crucial pieces in taking the next step under Kevin Sumlin. Most notably, another elite quarterback is heading to College Station in **Kyler Murray**. The No. 1 dual-threat quarterback in the country, Murray accumulated more than 10,000 passing yards and 4,000 rushing yards over the course of his high school career, as well as 186 total touchdowns.

As exciting as those quarterbacks are though, more important for Texas A&M was the addition they were able to garner on the defensive front. Five-star defensive tackle **Daylon Mack** is the kind of force up front on defense that the Aggies have been missing. Also on defense, the Aggies added two elite safeties in **Justin Dunning** and **Larry Pryor** and a U.S. Army All-American on the defensive line in **James Lockhart**.

While the defense is getting upgrades, the offense is getting reinforcements. Arizona native **Christian Kirk** is may be the top slot receiver in the country and should be very productive immediately for the Aggies. We also think that **Keaton Sutherland** is an offensive tackle that has a shot to continue Texas A&M's trend of putting offensive tackles into the first round of the NFL draft.

12. UCLA

With the departure of Brett Hundley to the NFL and the quarterback job wide open, UCLA's most important piece of the 2015 puzzle came in the form of quarterback **Josh Rosen**, a rare talent that has a legit opportunity to win the starting job as a true freshman. Rosen has size, arm talent, functional athleticism and he is an early enrollee that has spent the spring in Westwood. He was ranked by 247Sports Composite as the No. 1 quarterback in the nation.

Though Rosen is homegrown out of southern California, the rest of the class has a very national feel. **Soso Jamabo** out of Plano West High School in Texas comes in as the No. 2 running back in the country, **Chris Clark** out of Connecticut brings his 6-6 frame in as the No. 2 tight end in the country. **Josh Wariboko** out of Oklahoma, **Fred Ulu-Perry** out of Hawaii and **Andre James** out of Utah are all four-stars adding depth to the Bruins' developing offensive line.

The two other signature signings for this class were more local. **Keisean Lucier-South** is a five-star defensive end that has elite pass rushing ability and **DeChaun Holiday** is a cornerback with safety size who can cover.

13. Notre Dame

From the quarterback on down, Notre Dame got some of the best in the country in its 2015 class. **Brandon Wimbush** is ranked by 247Sports Composite as the No. 3 dual-threat quarterback in the country but there isn't a better arm anywhere. When the 6-2, 205-pounder flipped his commitment from Penn State to Notre Dame, that put a huge stamp on the Irish's class.

The talent around Wimbush starts up front on both sides of the ball with **Tristen Hoge**, the nephew of former NFL running back Merril Hoge checking in as the nation's No. 1 center. On defense, **Jerry Tillery** out of Shreveport, La., is the No. 11 offensive tackle in the country but will start out on the defensive side of the ball for the Irish. At 6-6, 308 pounds, Tillery has rare athleticism.

A four-star trio of **Tevon Coney**, **Josh Barajas** and **Asmar Bilal** add elite depth to the Notre Dame linebacking corps, while **Dexter Williams** adds dynamic athleticism at running back. **Aliz'e Jones** brings matchup issues for defenses at the tight end position as the nation's No. 1 tight end in 2015 and keep an eye on **CJ Sanders** as an undersized but productive and polished wide receiver.

14. Penn State

As James Franklin continues to put his stamp on the Penn State program from a recruiting standpoint, a focus has been placed on winning the home state and winning the home region. In 2015, Penn State was able to accomplish that. In the state of Pennsylvania, the staff extended 14 offers in the 2015 class. Twelve of those prospects are heading to Happy Valley this fall. That's a dominating effort.

Among those 12 signees, running back **Saquon Barkley**, defensive end **Ryan Buchholz**, linebacker **Jake Cooper** and cornerback **John Reid** are among the prospects expected to have the biggest impact. Barkley emerged on the camp circuit after his junior season and then had a monster senior season. Cooper and Buchholz also put together outstanding senior efforts on film, while Reid was one of the most productive prospects over the course of his career in the state.

As effective as Penn State was in recruiting the high school ranks, maybe its most important recruit came from junior college. **Paris Palmer** at 6-8, 300-plus pounds may be an instant contributor as Penn State tries to shore up an offensive line that was a weakness during the 2014 season.

From outside the state, **Garrett Taylor** was one of the nation's most highly recruited cornerbacks out of Virginia and **Juwan Johnson** out of New Jersey may be the most physically imposing receiver body in this class.

15. Oklahoma

With eight prospects enrolling early at Oklahoma there are several early impact candidates that could emerge out of the 2015 effort for Bob Stoops and perhaps none are more capable of making a splash than **Dede Westbrook** out of Blinn Community College. Westbrook led the nation in receiving as a JUCO sophomore and has the kind of route-running ability and maturity to be a factor immediately.

One prospect that we don't expect to contribute right away is defensive tackle signee **Neville Gallimore**. The U.S. Army All-American and 247Sports Top100 prospect hails from Canada and injured his knee in the winter. He will be in recovery and rehab mode through the spring and summer, but long term there may not be a defensive lineman in this class with more upside.

In terms of upside, Oklahoma has landed prospects all over the field worth a mention. **Will Sunderland** is a 6-3 safety with elite speed and athleticism who has a chance to add weight and grow into a scary back-end defender. Defensive lineman **Gabriel Campbell** out of Yazoo City Mississippi is a massive athlete who earned a four-star grade on 247Sports based purely on upside. Meanwhile **Dahu Green** is an in-state find that could be a big-time wide receiver at 6-4, 205 pounds.

16. Oregon

More speed and length are heading to Eugene to ensure that Oregon teams of the future look very similar to the high-scoring Oregon teams of the recent past. **Taj Griffin** out of Powder Springs (Ga.) McEachern was the No. 1 all-purpose back in the country according to the 247Sports Composite rankings and has DeAnthony Thomas big-play ability. Five-star defensive end **Canton Kaumatule,** at 6-7 290, is a carbon copy of Arik Armstead. Offensive tackle **Brady Aiello** at six-foot-six could be the next Jake Fisher on the offensive line based on length and athleticism.

The quarterback of the future looks similar to the quarterbacks of the past as well. Anaheim (Calif.) Servite U.S. Army All-American **Travis Waller** rushed for more than 2,000 yards and 26 touchdowns in his final two high school seasons, while also passing for close to 3,500 yards.

The common theme for Oregon once again though is speed and length. Eight signees in the 2015 class are 6-5 or taller. In Griffin, and fellow all-purpose backs **Kirk Merritt** and **Malik Lovette** there isn't a man among them that runs slower than a 4.4 40-yard dash and even 6-3 safety **Dylan Kane** is a 100-meter champion out of Hawaii.

17. Ole Miss

For the second consecutive year, Ole Miss landed one of the top offensive guards in the nation out of its own state, this time with **Javon Patterson**. Patterson, ranked as the No. 3 offensive guard in the country per 247Sports Composite and will join Roderick Taylor who was ranked No. 2 at the position one year earlier.

Patterson enrolled early at Ole Miss and was joined by four JUCO commits as early enrollees. Included in that group was the nation's No. 1 JUCO defensive tackle in **D.J. Jones,** as well as the nation's No. 1 JUCO CB in **Tony Bridges**. Even those guys aren't as important as the arrival of **Chad Kelly** from East Mississippi Community College. The Clemson bounce-back will arrive with an opportunity to be an answer at quarterback for the Rebels as Hugh Freeze looks to replace Bo Wallace at the quarterback position.

If he wins the job, Kelly will inherit a talented roster of receivers that is only getting stronger with the arrival of the class of 2015. **Damarkus Lodge** out of Cedar Hill, Texas and **Van Jefferson** out of Brentwood, Tenn., constitute one of the better wide receiver tandems in the country in this class.

Other prospects that we're bullish on include offensive tackle **Alex Givens**, safety **Armani Linton** and quarterback **Jason Pellerin**, an extremely talented kid that just needs some time to develop under center.

18. Mississippi State

While some programs try to reinvent themselves on the recruiting trail, Dan Mullen continues to focus on the approach that led to a breakout season in 2014. That approach consists of recruiting extremely well in the state of Mississippi, its border states and the junior college ranks. With the 2015 effort, the Bulldogs did just that, landing 12 in-state commits and another four Mississippi JUCO signees. Among that JUCO group, electric speedster **Donald Gray** leads the way along with the No. 1 junior college offensive tackle **Martinas Rankin**.

From the high school ranks, a foundation of four-star LB **Leo Lewis**, Army All-American safety **Jamal Peters** and athletic defensive end **Fletcher Adams** will bring Mississippi State elite playmakers at all three levels of the defense. Joining the 6-3 frame of Peters, there is length all over the secondary in this 2015 group with 6-1 cornerback **Chris Stamps** and 6-3 safety **Mark McLaurin** also roaming the back end.

Offensively, the Bulldogs are bringing in dynamic, explosive athletes led by Memphis athlete **Deddrick Thomas** and Jackson-area standout **Malik Dear**. At running back **Nick Gibson** is a thick, powerful back coming in alongside all-purpose back **Keith Mixon**.

19. South Carolina

What was once a top 10 class lost some luster late in the process as the Gamecocks dealt with numerous late decommitments. Still, Steve Spurrier was able to reel in a top-20 class and with it comes one of the elite defensive prospects in the junior college system for the 2015 cycle. **Marquavius**

Lewis at 6-4, 266 pounds comes to Columbia as the No. 3 JUCO prospect in the country and the No. 1 strongside defensive end. He won't be alone up front, as six-foot-4, 302-pound DE **Dexter Wideman** — a 2014 signee for South Carolina — re-signed in 2015 as a prep school prospect and is the nation's No. 1 prep school recruit. With **Dante Sawyer** and **Shameik Blackshear** included in the class, South Carolina is getting four four-star level defensive linemen to add to its defense.

Though it wasn't a big group, South Carolina found some big bodies on the offensive line — Offensive guard **Trey Derouen**; 6-7 offensive tackle **Blake Camper**; 6-7, offensive tackle **Christian Pellage,** and the best of the bunch, 6-5, 315-pounder **Zack Bailey,** combine to bring a lot of beef to the line of scrimmage on the offensive side in Columbia.

20. Arizona State

If you're looking for an emerging power on the recruiting trail, look in the direction of Tempe and Arizona State. The Pac-12 has collectively been on the rise from a talent accumulation perspective and Arizona State is one of the drivers of that boon. In 2015, the crown jewel is U.S. Army All-American quarterback **Brady White**. The four-star is one of two elite arms that offensive coordinator Mike Norvell is bringing in, with the other being a very talented prospect in his own right, in-state talent **Bryce Perkins**.

On the national front, Arizona State also dipped into Louisiana for a talented defensive end named **Jalen Bates** and got all the way to Virginia for four-star Army All-American **Jaason Lewis**. Even Tennessee had a Sun Devil footprint with a pickup from late-rising cornerback **Kareem Orr** out of Chattanooga.

Ultimately this class was driven by a strong California presence though and Arizona State was able to land some of the truly elite California prospects, namely jumbo athlete **Jay Jay Wilson**, linebacker **Khaylan Thomas** and defensive end **Joseph Wicker**. All were four-stars and all have a chance to be special.

21. Florida

In the weeks leading up to National Signing Day, Florida's recruiting class under first-year head coach Jim McElwain was ranked dead last in the SEC and well outside the national top 50. That Florida landed inside the Top 25 is a testament to the close that Florida's new staff was able to put together down the stretch.

That home-stretch close was spearheaded by two huge commitments that weren't announced until Signing Day: **Martez Ivey** (the top offensive tackle in the country and the No. 2 player overall) and **CeCe Jefferson** (the No. 2 strongside defensive end in the country and No. 7 player overall). Those two five-stars had long been considered Florida leans, but needed an excuse to commit to the Gators. McElwain gave them that excuse and ultimately they turned a good class into potentially a great one.

Other big gets down the stretch for Florida included former Miami RB commit out of powerhouse St. Thoams Aquinas HS, **Jordan Scarlett**, four-star Miami native **Jordan Cronkrite**, Tallahassee four-star athlete **D'Anfernee McGriff** and maybe the sleeper of the class **Jabari Zuniga**.

22. Michigan State

With Mark Dantonio at the helm, Michigan State typically brings in modest recruiting classes that produce big-time results on the field and in the NFL draft. This top 25 effort features a group that could have that same kind of upside.

One prospect that will have a hard time outplaying his ranking is **Larry Scott** out of Hubbard, Ohio and that's only because he comes in ranked as a borderline five-star. The 6-2, 230-pound bruiser has the look of a productive feature back in the Big Ten that can set the tone for an offense.

Two other tone-setters coming to East Lansing will be at home on the line of scrimmage with Detroit's **Kyonta Stallworth** and Chicago's **Raequan Williams**. The 6-4, 276-pound Stallworth is a physical offensive line presence, while Williams is a late-rising athletic defensive tackle. Both were ranked in the Top 20 nationally at their position.

At the quarterback position, **Brian Lewerke** is a big, smooth, accurate passer out of Phoenix, Ariz., and his future primary target, 6-2 **Felton Davis** III out of Virginia, should combine for a lot of downfield connections over the next few years.

23. Arkansas

In the 2015 edition of Bret Bielema's transformation of the Arkansas football program, we see an unprecedented influx of talent at the tight end position.

Offensive line has become a strength in Fayetteville and tight end is just an extension of that. With three of the top 20 tight ends in the country part of this class, we think all three have NFL upside. **Will Gragg** (6-4/245), **C.J. O'Grady** (6-4/230) and **Austin Cantrell** (6-4/249) are all big bodies, with frames that can create matchup problems as both blockers and receivers.

Despite the tight end talent coming in, Bielema didn't neglect the true offensive linemen either. Six-foot-6 in-state talent **Colton Jackson** could be a local steal, while **Jalen Merrick** out of New Smyrna Beach, Fla., was the national recruiting win for the Hogs.

On the defensive line **Hjalte Froholdt** brings a big 6-4, 280-pound frame to the line of scrimmage to add a physical presence up front and **Jamario Bell**, from an athleticism, size and upside standpoint could be one of the top long-term names to emerge from this group. We think the Razorbacks found themselves a major steal out of Georgia as well in defensive end **T.J. Smith** who dominated for the best team in Georgia as a senior.

24. Stanford

Stanford has become very much a national brand over the course of the last 10 years and this 2015 class is a great illustration of that national draw. Thirteen different states are represented within David Shaw's 22 signees and they come from every geographical corner: New Jersey to Ohio to Tennessee, Florida, Utah, Louisiana and Washington. Of course, California is also well represented with precise route-runner **Trent Irwin** and big cornerback **Frank Buncom IV** coming in as the highest ranked commits in the 2015 class.

While Stanford is no stranger to Louisiana, the Cardinal beat out LSU and other regional powers for safety **Justin Reid** with the help of a local celebrity. Reid is the younger brother of San Francisco 49ers safety and former LSU standout Eric Reid. His brother's familiarity with the area no doubt helped Stanford land one of the biggest steals of the 2015 class.

Along with Buncom and Reid, Stanford added **Ben Edwards** out of Florida and **Quenton Meeks** out of the San Diego area to put together what was quietly one of the best defensive back classes in the country.

25. Missouri

The Tigers are always unearthing recruiting gems and turning them into NFL talents and this year we think they found one of their biggest sleepers yet…literally. At 6-7, 220-pounds, wide receiver **Justin Smith** out of Dublin (Ga.) West Laurens could be a phenomenal mismatch on the outside in the Tigers spread offense. Nobody is talking about him, but he could be one of the top talents in this Missouri class.

The guy everyone is talking about is five-star defensive tackle **Terry Beckner Jr.**, and rightly so. Beckner is an East St. Louis (Ill.) High School product and was ranked by 247Sports Composite as the No. 3 defensive tackle in the country in a phenomenal year at the position. On the other side of the ball, junior college offensive tackle **Malik Cuellar** could compete for early playing time on the line of scrimmage.

The defensive sleeper to watch is **Terez Hall** out of Lithonia (Ga.) Martin Luther King. The 6-3, active, athletic linebacker was a late riser on the recruiting trail and we think he's an impact guy.

At quarterback, Gary Pinkel got his man. Army All-American **Drew Lock** is 6-3 with a great frame, a great arm and great athleticism. He's a high major basketball recruit but has NFL talent under center.

100 FOR 2015

INCOMING FRESHMEN

TOP 100 PLAYERS

Rk.	Name	Pos	Ht.	Wt.	High School/Hometown	School
1.	Trent Thompson	DT	6-2.5	313	Westover (Albany, GA)	Georgia
2.	Martez Ivey	OT	6-5.5	275	Apopka (Apopka, FL)	Florida
3.	Byron Cowart	SDE	6-4	250	Armwood (Seffner, FL)	Auburn
4.	Iman Marshall	CB	6-1	190	Long Beach Poly (Long Beach, CA)	USC
5.	Derwin James	S	6-2	201	Haines City Senior (Haines City, FL)	Florida State
6.	Kahlil McKenzie	DT	6-3	354	Clayton Valley (Concord, CA)	Tennessee
7.	CeCe Jefferson	SDE	6-2	275	Baker County Senior (Glen Saint Mary, FL)	Florida
8.	Kevin Toliver II	CB	6-2	185	Trinity Christian Academy (Jacksonville, FL)	LSU
9.	Josh Sweat	WDE	6-5	240	Oscar Smith (Chesapeake, VA)	Florida State
10.	Malik Jefferson	OLB	6-2.5	215	Poteet (Mesquite, TX)	Texas
11.	Calvin Ridley	WR	6-0	170	Monarch (Pompano Beach, FL)	Alabama
12.	Josh Rosen	PRO	6-4	205	St. John Bosco (Bellflower, CA)	UCLA
13.	Terry Beckner Jr.	DT	6-4	293	East St. Louis (East Saint Louis, IL)	Missouri
14.	Daylon Mack	DT	6-1	330	Gladewater (Gladewater, TX)	Texas A&M
15.	Tarvarus McFadden	CB	6-2	198	American Heritage (Fort Lauderdale, FL)	Florida State
16.	Canton Kaumatule	SDE	6-7	290	Punahou (Honolulu, HI)	Oregon
17.	Keisean Lucier-South	WDE	6-4	208	Lutheran - Orange County (Orange, CA)	UCLA
18.	Deon Cain	WR	6-1.5	194	Tampa Bay Tech (Tampa, FL)	Clemson
19.	George Campbell	WR	6-3	184	East Lake (Tarpon Springs, FL)	Florida State
20.	Kendall Sheffield	CB	6-0	181	Fort Bend Marshall (Missouri City, TX)	Alabama
21.	Blake Barnett	PRO	6-4.5	200	Santiago (Corona, CA)	Alabama
22.	Mitch Hyatt	OT	6-5	272	North Gwinnett (Suwanee, GA)	Clemson
23.	Rasheem Green	DT	6-5	275	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	USC
24.	Christian Wilkins	DT	6-4	290	Suffield Academy (Suffield, CT)	Clemson
25.	Christian Kirk	WR	5-10	191	Saguaro (Scottsdale, AZ)	Texas A&M
26.	Chuma Edoga	OG	6-3	280	McEachern (Powder Springs, GA)	USC
27.	Tyron Johnson	WR	6-1	191	Warren Easton (New Orleans, LA)	LSU
28.	Terry Godwin	ATH	6-0	168	Callaway (Hogansville, GA)	Georgia
29.	Daron Payne	DT	6-2	325	Shades Valley (Birmingham, AL)	Alabama
30.	Minkah Fitzpatrick	CB	6-1	198	St. Peters Prep (Jersey City, NJ)	Alabama
31.	Damien Harris	RB	5-11	205	Madison Southern (Berea, KY)	Alabama
32.	Soso Jamabo	RB	6-2.5	210	Plano West (Plano, TX)	UCLA
33.	Kyler Murray	DUAL	5-10	180	Allen (Allen, TX)	Texas A&M
34.	Justin Hilliard	OLB	6-0	225	St. Xavier (Cincinnati, OH)	Ohio State
35.	Osa Masina	OLB	6-3.5	230	Brighton (Salt Lake City, UT)	USC
36.	Kyle Phillips	SDE	6-3.5	250	Hillsboro (Nashville, TN)	Tennessee
37.	Maea Teuhema	OG	6-4.5	340	Keller (Keller, TX)	LSU
38.	Jarrett Stidham	DUAL	6-4	195	Stephenville (Stephenville, TX)	Baylor
39.	Jacques Patrick	RB	6-1.5	230	Timber Creek (Orlando, FL)	Florida State
40.	Ronald Jones II	RB	6-0	185	McKinney North (Mckinney, TX)	USC
41.	Porter Gustin	OLB	6-5	245	Salem Hills (Salem, UT)	USC
42.	Kerryon Johnson	ATH	6-0	200	Madison Academy (Madison, AL)	Auburn
43.	Damarkus Lodge	WR	6-2.5	190	Cedar Hill (Cedar Hill, TX)	Ole Miss
44.	Deionte Thompson	S	6-2	181	West Orange-Stark (Orange, TX)	Alabama
45.	Brandon Wimbush	DUAL	6-2	205	St. Peters Prep (Jersey City, NJ)	Notre Dame
46.	Derrius Guice	RB	5-10.5	213	Catholic (Baton Rouge, LA)	LSU
47.	Roquan Smith	OLB	6-2	207	Macon County (Montezuma, GA)	Georgia
48.	Preston Williams	WR	6-4	191	Lovejoy (Hampton, GA)	Tennessee
49.	John Houston	OLB	6-3	211	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	USC
50.	Breiden Fehoko	DT	6-3	290	Farrington (Honolulu, HI)	Texas Tech
51.	Taj Griffin	APB	5-10	175	McEachern (Powder Springs, GA)	Oregon
52.	Javon Patterson	OG	6-2.5	317	Petal (Petal, MS)	Ole Miss
53.	Shy Tuttle	DT	6-3	320	North Davidson (Lexington, NC)	Tennessee
54.	Lester Cotton	OG	6-4	325	Central Sch (Tuscaloosa, AL)	Alabama
55.	Drew Richmond	OT	6-5	310	Memphis University School (Memphis, TN)	Tennessee
56.	Donte Jackson	ATH	5-11	164	Riverdale (New Orleans, LA)	LSU
57.	Jalen Dalton	WDE	6-5	235	West Forsyth (Clemmons, NC)	North Carolina
58.	Jamal Peters	S	6-1.5	206	Bassfield (Bassfield, MS)	Mississippi State
59.	Larry Scott	RB	6-2	228	Hubbard (Hubbard, OH)	Michigan State
60.	Marvell Tell	S	6-1.5	188	Crespi (Encino, CA)	USC
61.	Jerome Baker	ATH	6-2	203	Benedictine (Cleveland, OH)	Ohio State
62.	Aliz'e Jones	TE	6-4.5	218	Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas, NV)	Notre Dame
63.	Leo Lewis	ILB	6-3	225	Brookhaven (Brookhaven, MS)	Mississippi State
64.	Richie Petitbon	OG	6-4	301	Gonzaga (Washington, DC)	Alabama
65.	Deondre Francois	PRO	6-1	195	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	Florida State
66.	Jonathan Ledbetter	SDE	6-4	265	Tucker (Tucker, GA)	Georgia
67.	Brady White	PRO	6-0.5	180	Hart (Newhall, CA)	Arizona State
68.	DeChaun Holiday	CB	6-3	195	Mission Hills (San Marcos, CA)	UCLA
69.	Jacob Daniel	DT	6-4	310	Clovis North (Clovis, CA)	USC
70.	Trent Irwin	WR	6-1.5	189	Hart (Newhall, CA)	Stanford
71.	Jake Browning	PRO	6-2	185	Folsom (Folsom, CA)	Washington
72.	Neville Gallimore	DT	6-2	330	Canada Prep Football Acad. (St. Catharines, ON)	Oklahoma
73.	Anthony Wheeler	OLB	6-2	225	Skyline (Dallas, TX)	Texas
74.	Brian Cole	ATH	6-2	190	Heritage (Saginaw, MI)	Michigan
75.	Johnny Frasier	RB	5-10	229	Princeton (Princeton, NC)	N.C. State
76.	Torrance Gibson	ATH	6-4	204	American Heritage (Fort Lauderdale, FL)	Ohio State
77.	Chris Warren	RB	6-2	240	Rockwall (Rockwall, TX)	Texas
78.	Michael Weber	RB	5-9.5	219	Cass Technical (Detroit, MI)	Ohio State
79.	Ricky Town	PRO	6-3	206	St. Bonaventure (Ventura, CA)	USC
80.	Holton Hill	CB	6-2	184	Lamar (Houston, TX)	Texas
81.	Ray-Ray McCloud III	ATH	5-9	175	Sickles (Tampa, FL)	Clemson
82.	Arden Key	WDE	6-5	230	Hapeville Charter (Atlanta, GA)	LSU
83.	Mark Walton	RB	5-10	179	Booker T. Washington (Miami, FL)	Miami
84.	Ykili Ross	CB	6-0.5	175	Polytechnic (Riverside, CA)	USC
85.	Chris Clark	TE	6-6	247	Avon Old Farms (Avon, CT)	UCLA
86.	Ricky DeBerry	ILB	6-2.5	240	Atlee (Mechanicsville, VA)	Oklahoma
87.	Joseph Wicker	SDE	6-2	278	Long Beach Poly (Long Beach, CA)	Arizona State
88.	Natrez Patrick	WDE	6-3	259	Mays (Atlanta, GA)	Georgia
89.	Tristen Hoge	OC	6-4	276	Highland (Pocatello, ID)	Notre Dame
90.	Daylon Charlot	WR	6-0	193	Patterson (Patterson, LA)	Alabama
91.	Jashon Cornell	SDE	6-4	260	Cretin Derham Hall (Saint Paul, MN)	Ohio State
92.	Albert Huggins	DT	6-3	283	Orangeburg-Wilkinson (Orangeburg, SC)	Clemson
93.	Abdul Bello	OT	6-6	295	Montverde Academy (Montverde, FL)	Florida State
94.	Dexter Williams	RB	6-0	192	West Orange (Winter Garden, FL)	Notre Dame
95.	Mark Fields	CB	5-11	190	William Amos Hough (Cornelius, NC)	Clemson
96.	Drew Lock	PRO	6-3.5	205	Lee's Summit Sr. (Lees Summit, MO)	Missouri
97.	Isaiah Langley	CB	5-11.5	161	Foothill (Pleasanton, CA)	USC
98.	Kris Boyd	CB	5-11.5	185	Gilmer (Gilmer, TX)	Texas
99.	Da'Vante Phillips	WR	6-2	204	Miami Central (Miami, FL)	Florida State
100.	Eric Glover-Williams	CB	5-11	165	McKinley (Canton, OH)	Ohio State

100 FOR 2016

HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

TOP 100 PLAYERS

Rk.	Name	Pos	Ht.	Wt.	High School/Hometown	School
1.	Rashan Gary	DT	6-4	290	Paramus Catholic (Paramus, NJ)	
2.	Gregory Little	OT	6-5.5	305	Allen (Allen, TX)	Texas A&M
3.	Jacob Eason	PRO	6-5	205	Lake Stevens Sr (Lake Stevens, WA)	Georgia
4.	Derrick Brown	DT	6-4	305	Lanier (Buford, GA)	
5.	Shavar Manuel	SDE	6-5	262	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	
6.	Levonta Taylor	CB	5-11	182	Ocean Lakes (Virginia Beach, VA)	Florida State
7.	Nick Bosa	SDE	6-4	265	St. Thomas Aquinas (Fort Lauderdale, FL)	
8.	Lyndell Wilson	OLB	6-2	220	Carver (Montgomery, AL)	
9.	Saivion Smith	CB	6-1	175	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	LSU
10.	Kareem Walker	RB	6-1	210	De Paul Catholic (Wayne, NJ)	Ohio State
11.	Julian Rochester	DT	6-5.5	315	McEachern (Powder Springs, GA)	
12.	Keion Joyner	OLB	6-3	200	Havelock (Havelock, NC)	
13.	Rashard Lawrence	DT	6-3	305	Neville (Monroe, LA)	
14.	Ed Oliver	DT	6-2	277	Westfield (Houston, TX)	
15.	Patrick Hudson	OT	6-5.5	325	Silsbee (Silsbee, TX)	Baylor
16.	Edwin Alexander	DT	6-2	310	St. Thomas Aquinas (Hammond, LA)	LSU
17.	Shea Patterson	PRO	6-2	195	Calvary Baptist Academy (Shreveport, LA)	Ole Miss
18.	Dexter Lawrence	DT	6-5	310	Wake Forest-Rolesville (Wake Forest, NC)	
19.	Caleb Kelly	OLB	6-3	215	Clovis West (Fresno, CA)	
20.	Ben Davis	OLB	6-4	230	Gordo Sch (Gordo, AL)	
21.	Brandon Jones	S	5-11	183	Nacogdoches (Nacogdoches, TX)	
22.	Willie Allen	OT	6-7.5	300	John Curtis (New Orleans, LA)	
23.	Nate Craig-Myers	WR	6-2	205	Tampa Catholic (Tampa, FL)	Auburn
24.	Tavien Feaster	RB	6-0	193	Spartanburg (Spartanburg, SC)	Clemson
25.	Marlon Davidson	SDE	6-4	260	Carver (Montgomery, AL)	
26.	Malik Henry	PRO	6-3	180	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	Florida State
27.	Ben Bredeson	OT	6-5	270	Arrowhead (Hartland, WI)	
28.	Isaac Nauta	TE	6-4	237	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	Florida State
29.	Eric Monroe	S	6-0	180	North Shore (Houston, TX)	
30.	Demetris Robertson	ATH	6-1	165	Savannah Christian Prep (Savannah, GA)	
31.	KJ Costello	PRO	6-4	213	Santa Margarita Cath. (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA)	Stanford
32.	Tyler Vaughns	WR	6-3	175	Bishop Amat (La Puente, CA)	
33.	Shyheim Carter	CB	6-0	190	Kentwood (Kentwood, LA)	Alabama
34.	Janarius Robinson	WDE	6-5	250	Bay (Panama City, FL)	Florida State
35.	Kristian Fulton	CB	6-0	165	Archbishop Rummel (Metairie, LA)	
36.	Tommy Kraemer	OT	6-5	305	Elder (Cincinnati, OH)	Notre Dame
37.	Michal Menet	OT	6-5	265	Exeter Township Senior HS (Reading, PA)	
38.	Trayvon Mullen	CB	6-2	175	Coconut Creek (Pompano Beach, FL)	
39.	Mique Juarez	OLB	6-2	210	North High School (Torrance, CA)	USC
40.	Antwuan Jackson	DT	6-2.5	285	Cedar Grove (Ellenwood, GA)	
41.	Deontay Anderson	S	6-1	192	Manvel (Manvel, TX)	
42.	E.J. Price	OT	6-6	311	Archer (Lawrenceville, GA)	Georgia
43.	Demario McCall	RB	5-11	180	North Ridgeville (North Ridgeville, OH)	Ohio State
44.	Devin Duvernay	WR	5-11	195	Sachse (Sachse, TX)	
45.	Feleipe Franks	DUAL	6-5	220	Wakulla (Crawfordville, FL)	LSU
46.	Ben Cleveland	OT	6-7	322	Stephens County (Toccoa, GA)	Georgia
47.	Devin Asiasi	ATH	6-5	260	De La Salle (Concord, CA)	
48.	Breland Brandt	WDE	6-4	220	Windward School (Los Angeles, CA)	UCLA
49.	Shane Simmons	WDE	6-4	221	DeMatha Catholic (Hyattsville, MD)	Penn State
50.	McTelvin Agim	SDE	6-2.5	268	Hope (Hope, AR)	
51.	Sam Bruce	WR	5-8	160	St. Thomas Aquinas (Fort Lauderdale, FL)	Miami
52.	Rahshaun Smith	WDE	6-3	225	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	Clemson
53.	Lokeni Toailoa	ILB	6-1	212	Wilmer Amina Carter (Rialto, CA)	UCLA
54.	Michael Divinity	OLB	6-2	218	John Ehret (Marrero, LA)	
55.	Boss Tagaloa	DT	6-3	295	De La Salle (Concord, CA)	
56.	Kaden Smith	TE	6-5.5	235	Marcus (Flower Mound, TX)	Stanford
57.	Jonah Williams	OT	6-5	272	Folsom (Folsom, CA)	Alabama
58.	Kyle Davis	WR	6-3	211	Archer (Lawrenceville, GA)	South Carolina
59.	Benito Jones	DT	6-2	260	Wayne County (Waynesboro, MS)	Ole Miss
60.	John Raridon	OG	6-4	260	Valley (West Des Moines, IA)	Nebraska
61.	Dwayne Haskins	PRO	6-3	198	The Bullis School (Potomac, MD)	
62.	Miles Sanders	RB	5-10	195	Woodland Hills (Pittsburgh, PA)	Penn State
63.	Nigel Warrior	S	6-0	175	Peachtree Ridge (Suwanee, GA)	
64.	Kendell Jones	DT	6-4.5	361	Shoemaker (Killeen, TX)	
65.	Nigel Knott	CB	5-11	175	Germantown (Madison, MS)	
66.	DeKaylin Metcalf	WR	6-3	195	Oxford (Oxford, MS)	Ole Miss
67.	Jack Jones	ATH	5-10	170	Long Beach Poly (Long Beach, CA)	
68.	Eli Stove	WR	6-1	178	Niceville (Niceville, FL)	
69.	Marquez Callaway	ATH	6-2	170	Warner Robins (Warner Robins, GA)	
70.	Dylan Crawford	WR	6-1	175	Santa Margarita Cath. (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA)	
71.	Chauncey Manac	WDE	6-3	220	Clinch County (Homerville, GA)	Georgia
72.	Oluwole Betiku	SDE	6-3.5	240	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	
73.	Josh King	SDE	6-6	250	Hinsdale South (Darien, IL)	
74.	Dee Anderson	WR	6-4	177	West Mesquite (Mesquite, TX)	LSU
75.	Stephen Sullivan	WR	6-5	230	Donaldsonville (Donaldsonville, LA)	LSU
76.	Scott Lashley	OT	6-6	300	West Point (West Point, MS)	
77.	Erick Fowler	WDE	6-1	232	Manor (Manor, TX)	
78.	Baveon Johnson	OC	6-3	310	Lake Gibson (Lakeland, FL)	Florida State
79.	Ahmir Mitchell	ATH	6-2	190	Cedar Creek (Egg Harbor City, NJ)	
80.	Liam Eichenberg	OT	6-6	290	St. Ignatius (Cleveland, OH)	Notre Dame
81.	Brendan Ferns	ILB	6-3	223	St. Clairsville (Saint Clairsville, OH)	
82.	Trevon Diggs	ATH	6-0	183	The Avalon School (Bethesda, MD)	
83.	Jordan Elliott	DT	6-4	305	Westside (Houston, TX)	
84.	George Hill	RB	6-0	200	Hubbard (Hubbard, OH)	Ohio State
85.	Devin White	ATH	6-0.5	235	North Webster (Springhill, LA)	
86.	Binjimen Victor	WR	6-4	170	Coconut Creek (Pompano Beach, FL)	
87.	Justin Madubuike	SDE	6-3	255	McKinney North (Mckinney, TX)	
88.	Terrance Davis	OG	6-4	305	DeMatha Catholic (Hyattsville, MD)	
89.	Darnell Salomon	WR	6-3	198	Miami Central (Miami, FL)	
90.	Jeffrey McCulloch	OLB	6-2.5	230	Aldine Davis (Houston, TX)	
91.	Mecole Hardman Jr.	CB	5-11	170	Elbert County (Elberton, GA)	
92.	Jake Hausmann	TE	6-5	235	Archbishop Moeller (Cincinnati, OH)	Ohio State
93.	Prince Sammons	SDE	6-8	280	Cincinnati Hills Christian Acad. (Cincinnati, OH)	
94.	Jawon Pass	DUAL	6-5	220	Carver (Columbus, GA)	
95.	Clark Yarbrough	OT	6-6	270	Woodberry Forest (Woodberry Forest, VA)	
96.	Jean Delance	OT	6-5	281	North Mesquite (Mesquite, TX)	
97.	John Broussard	CB	6-0	164	Central (Phenix City, AL)	
98.	Brandon Burton	S	6-2	195	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	
99.	Daelin Hayes	OLB	6-4	250	Skyline (Ann Arbor, MI)	USC
100.	Shurod Thompson	S	6-1	185	Liberty (Brentwood, CA)	California

TOP 5 PLAYERS
BY POSITION

Rk.	Name	Pos	Ht.	Wt.	High School/Hometown	School
QUARTERBACKS						
12.	Josh Rosen	PRO	6-4	205	St. John Bosco (Bellflower, CA)	UCLA
21.	Blake Barnett	PRO	6-4.5	200	Santiago (Corona, CA)	Alabama
33.	Kyler Murray	DUAL	5-10	180	Allen (Allen, TX)	Texas A&M
38.	Jarrett Stidham	DUAL	6-4	195	Stephenville (Stephenville, TX)	Baylor
45.	Brandon Wimbush	DUAL	6-2	205	St. Peters Prep (Jersey City, NJ)	Notre Dame
RUNNING BACKS						
31.	Damien Harris	RB	5-11	205	Madison Southern (Berea, KY)	Alabama
32.	Soso Jamabo	RB	6-2.5	210	Plano West (Plano, TX)	UCLA
39.	Jacques Patrick	RB	6-1.5	230	Timber Creek (Orlando, FL)	Florida State
40.	Ronald Jones II	RB	6-0	185	McKinney North (Mckinney, TX)	USC
46.	Derrius Guice	RB	5-10.5	213	Catholic (Baton Rouge, LA)	LSU
WIDE RECEIVERS						
11.	Calvin Ridley	WR	6-0	170	Monarch (Pompano Beach, FL)	Alabama
18.	Deon Cain	WR	6-1.5	194	Tampa Bay Tech (Tampa, FL)	Clemson
19.	George Campbell	WR	6-3	184	East Lake (Tarpon Springs, FL)	Florida State
25.	Christian Kirk	WR	5-10	191	Saguaro (Scottsdale, AZ)	Texas A&M
27.	Tyron Johnson	WR	6-1	191	Warren Easton (New Orleans, LA)	LSU
TIGHT ENDS						
62.	Aliz'e Jones	TE	6-4.5	218	Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas, NV)	Notre Dame
85.	Chris Clark	TE	6-6	247	Avon Old Farms (Avon, CT)	UCLA
145	Hale Hentges	TE	6-6	230	Helias (Jefferson City, MO)	Alabama
187	Garrett Williams	TE	6-4	220	The First Academy (Orlando, FL)	Clemson
191	Jackson Harris	TE	6-6	250	Columbia Central (Columbia, TN)	Georgia
OFFENSIVE LINE						
2.	Martez Ivey	OT	6-5.5	275	Apopka (Apopka, FL)	Florida
22.	Mitch Hyatt	OT	6-5	272	North Gwinnett (Suwanee, GA)	Clemson
26.	Chuma Edoga	OG	6-3	280	McEachern (Powder Springs, GA)	USC
37.	Maea Teuhema	OG	6-4.5	340	Keller (Keller, TX)	LSU
52.	Javon Patterson	OG	6-2.5	317	Petal (Petal, MS)	Ole Miss
DEFENSIVE TACKLE						
1.	Trent Thompson	DT	6-2.5	313	Westover (Albany, GA)	Georgia
6.	Kahlil McKenzie	DT	6-3	354	Clayton Valley (Concord, CA)	Tennessee
13.	Terry Beckner Jr.	DT	6-4	293	East St. Louis (East Saint Louis, IL)	Missouri
14.	Daylon Mack	DT	6-1	330	Gladewater (Gladewater, TX)	Texas A&M
23.	Rasheem Green	DT	6-5	275	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	USC
DEFENSIVE END						
3.	Byron Cowart	SDE	6-4	250	Armwood (Seffner, FL)	Auburn
7.	CeCe Jefferson	SDE	6-2	275	Baker County Senior (Glen Saint Mary, FL)	Florida
9.	Josh Sweat	WDE	6-5	240	Oscar Smith (Chesapeake, VA)	Florida State
16.	Canton Kaumatule	SDE	6-7	290	Punahou (Honolulu, HI)	Oregon
17.	Keisean Lucier-South	WDE	6-4	208	Lutheran - Orange County (Orange, CA)	UCLA
LINEBACKERS						
10.	Malik Jefferson	OLB	6-2.5	215	Poteet (Mesquite, TX)	Texas
34.	Justin Hilliard	OLB	6-0	225	St. Xavier (Cincinnati, OH)	Ohio State
35.	Osa Masina	OLB	6-3.5	230	Brighton (Salt Lake City, UT)	USC
41.	Porter Gustin	OLB	6-5	245	Salem Hills (Salem, UT)	USC
47.	Roquan Smith	OLB	6-2	207	Macon County (Montezuma, GA)	Georgia
DEFENSIVE BACKS						
4.	Iman Marshall	CB	6-1	190	Long Beach Poly (Long Beach, CA)	USC
5.	Derwin James	S	6-2	201	Haines City Senior (Haines City, FL)	Florida State
8.	Kevin Toliver II	CB	6-2	185	Trinity Christian Academy (Jacksonville, FL)	LSU
15.	Tarvarus McFadden	CB	6-2	198	American Heritage (Fort Lauderdale, FL)	Florida State
20.	Kendall Sheffield	CB	6-0	181	Fort Bend Marshall (Missouri City, TX)	Alabama
ATHLETE						
28.	Terry Godwin	ATH	6-0	168	Callaway (Hogansville, GA)	Georgia
42.	Kerryon Johnson	ATH	6-0	200	Madison Academy (Madison, AL)	Auburn
56.	Donte Jackson	ATH	5-11	164	Riverdale (New Orleans, LA)	LSU
61.	Jerome Baker	ATH	6-2	203	Benedictine (Cleveland, OH)	Ohio State
74.	Brian Cole	ATH	6-2	190	Heritage (Saginaw, MI)	Michigan

TOP 5 SCHOOLS
BY POSITION

Name, Ht, Wt, High School/Hometown

QUARTERBACK

1. Florida State
- Deondre Francois, 6-1/195, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
- De'Andre Johnson, 6-0/175, Jacksonville (Fla.) First Coast

2. Tennessee
- Jauan Jennings, 6-4/188, Murfreesboro (Tenn.) Blackman
- Quinten Dormady, 6-4/200, Boerne (Texas) High
- Sheriron Jones, 6-2.5/191, Moreno Valley (Calif.) Rancho Verde

3. Baylor
- Jarrett Stidham, 6-4/195, Stephenville (Texas) High

4. UCLA
- Josh Rosen, 6-4/205, Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco

5. USC
- Ricky Town, 6-3/206, Ventura (Calif.) St. Bonaventure
- Sam Darnold, 6-4/205, San Clemente (Calif.) High

RUNNING BACK

1. LSU
- Derrius Guice, 5-10.5/213, Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic
- Nick Brossette, 6-0/207, Baton Rouge (La.) University Lab
- David Ducre (FB), 5-11/238, Mandeville (La.) Lakeshore

2. Auburn
- Jovon Robinson, 5-11/225, Milledgeville (Ga.) Georgia Military
- Javarius Davis, 5-9.5/173, Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes
- Chandler Cox (FB), 6-2/225, Apopka (Fla.) High

3. N.C. State
- Johnny Frasier, 5-10/229, Princeton (N.C.) High
- Hyheim Hines, 5-9/187, Garner (N.C.) High
- Reggie Gallaspy, 5-11/205, Greensboro (N.C.) Southern Guilford

4. Alabama
- Damien Harris, 5-11/205, Berea (Ky.) Madison Southern
- Desherrius Flowers, 6-0.5/204, Mobile (Ala.) Vigor

5. Penn State
- Saquon Barkley, 5-11/190, Whitehall (Pa.) High
- Andre Robinson, 5-9/205, Harrisburg (Pa.) Bishop McDevitt

WIDE RECEIVER

1. Florida State
- George Campbell, 6-3/184, Tarpon Springs (Fla.) East Lake
- Da'Vante Phillips, 6-2/204, Miami (Fla.) Central
- Auden Tate, 6-4.5/215, Tampa (Fla.) Wharton
- Nyqwan Murray, 5-10.5/163, Orlando (Fla.) Oak Ridge

2. Notre Dame
- Equanimeous St. Brown, 6-5/205, Anaheim (Calif.) Servite
- Miles Boykin, 6-4/220, New Lenox (Ill.) Providence Catholic
- C.J. Sanders, 5-9/177, Sherman Oaks (Calif.) Notre Dame
- Jalen Guyton, 6-1/190, Allen (Texas) High

3. Ole Miss
Damarkus Lodge, 6-2.5/190, Cedar Hill (Texas) High
Van Jefferson, 6-2/183, Brentwood (Tenn.) Ravenwood

4. LSU
Tyron Johnson, 6-1/191, New Orleans (La.) Warren East
Derrick Dillon, 5-11/173, Franklinton (La.) Pine
Jazz Ferguson, 6-5/205, Saint Francisville (La.) West Feliciana
Brandon Martin, 6-4.5/200, Dallas (Texas) Prime Prep Academy

5. Alabama
Calvin Ridley, 6-0/170, Pompano Beach (Fla.) Monarch
Daylon Charlot, 6-0/193, Patterson (La.) High

TIGHT END

1. Arkansas
C.J. O'Grady, 6-4/230, Fayetteville (Ark.) High
Will Gragg, 6-4/245, Dumas (Ark.) High
Austin Cantrell, 6-4/249, Roland (Ark.) High

2. Wisconsin
Kyle Penniston, 6-5/232, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei
David Edwards, 6-7/245, Downers Grove (Ill.) North

3. Notre Dame
Aliz'e Jones, 6-4.5/218, Las Vegas (Nev.) Bishop Gorman

4. UCLA
Chris Clark, 6-6/247, Avon (Conn.) Old Farms

5. Alabama
Hale Hentges, 6-5/230, Jefferson City (Mo.) Helias

OFFENSIVE LINE

1. UCLA
Josh Wariboko, 6-3.5/315, Oklahoma City (Okla.) Casady School
Fred Ulu-Perry, 6-2/300, Honolulu (Hawaii) St. Louis
Andre James, 6-5/275, Herriman (Utah) High
Tevita Halalilo, 6-4/315, Moreno Valley (Calif.) Rancho Verde
Zach Bateman, 6-7/320, Costa Mesa (Calif.) Orange Coast

2. LSU
Maea Teuhema, 6-4.5/340, Keller (Texas) High
Chidi Valentine-Okeke, 6-6/305, Ludowici (Ga.) Faith Baptist Christian Acad.
Toby Weathersby, 6-4.5/295, Houston (Texas) Westfield
Adrian Magee, 6-5/315, Franklinton (La.) High
George Brown Jr., 6-6/253, Cincinnati (Ohio) Winton Woods

3. Alabama
Lester Cotton, 6-4/325, Tuscaloosa (Ala.) Central
Richie Petitbon, 6-4/301, Washington (D.C.) Gonzaga
Dallas Warmack, 6-1.5/306, Atlanta (Ga.) Mays
Brandon Kennedy, 6-2.5/295, Wetumpka (Ala.) High
Matt Warmack, 6-7/320, Senatobia (Miss.) Magnolia Heights

4. Tennessee
Drew Richmond, 6-5/310, Memphis (Tenn.) University School
Jack Jones, 6-5/290, Murfreesboro (Tenn.) Oakland
Venzell Boulware, 6-4/290, Fairburn (Ga.) Creekside
Zach Stewart, 6-4/295, Coalfield (Tenn.) High
Chance Hall, 6-5/305, Roanoke (Va.) Northside
Riley Lovingood (LS), 6-1/240, Hendersonville (Tenn.) Beech

5. Ohio State
Isaiah Prince, 6-6/272, Greenbelt (Md.) Eleanor Roosevelt
Matthew Burrell, 6-4/321, Woodbridge (Va.) C.D. Hylton
Grant Schmidt, 6-6/275, Sioux Falls (S.D.) Roosevelt
Kevin Feder, 6-9/305, Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep
Brandon Bowen, 6-7/330, Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon
Mirko Jurkovic, 6-5/275, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
Liam McCullough (LS), 6-2/213, Columbus (Ohio) Worthington Kilbourne

DEFENSIVE LINE

1. Tennessee
Kahlil McKenzie, 6-3/354, Concord (Calif.) Clayton Valley
Kyle Phillips, 6-3.5/250, Nashville (Tenn.) Hillsboro
Shy Tuttle, 6-3/320, Lexington (N.C.) North Davidson
Andrew Butcher, 6-2/242, Alpharetta (Ga.) High
Darrell Taylor, 6-4/230, Hopewell (Va.) High
Quay Picou, 6-2/271, Buford (Ga.) High

2. Clemson
Albert Huggins, 6-3/283, Orangeburg (S.C.) Wilkinson
Christian Wilkins, 6-4/290, Suffield (Conn.) Suffield Academy
Clelin Ferrell, 6-5/225, Richmond (Va.) Benedictine
Austin Bryant, 6-5/250, Thomasville (Ga.) Thomas County Central
Sterling Johnson, 6-5/281, Clayton (N.C.) Cleveland
Gage Cervenka, 6-1/275, Greenwood (S.C.) Emerald
LaSamuel Davis, 6-3/194, Bamberg (S.C.) Ehrhardt

3. Georgia
Trent Thompson, 6-2.5/313, Albany (Ga.) Westover
Jonathan Ledbetter, 6-4/265, Tucker (Ga.) High
Natrez Patrick, 6-3/259, Atlanta (Ga.) Mays
D'Andre Walker, 6-2.5/209, Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes
Chauncey Rivers, 6-2.5/247, Stone Mountain (Ga.) Stevenson
Michael Barnett, 6-5/258, Dorchester (S.C.) Woodland
DaQuan Hawkins, 6-4/285, Atlanta (Ga.) Westlake
Justin Young, 6-3.5/255, Loganville (Ga.) Grayson

4. Alabama
Daron Payne, 6-2/325, Birmingham (Ala.) Shades Valley
Mekhi Brown, 6-4.5/222, Columbus (Ga.) Carver
Anfernee Jennings, 6-3/256, Dadeville (Ala.) High
Christian Bell, 6-4/220, Birmingham (Ala.) Hoover

5. USC
Rasheem Green, 6-5/275, Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra
Jacob Daniel, 6-4/310, Clovis (Calif.) North
Noah Jefferson, 6-5/271, Las Vegas (Nev.) Desert Oasis
Christian Rector, 6-3.5/255, Los Angeles (Calif.) Loyola

LINEBACKER

1. USC
Osa Masina, 6-3.5/230, Salt Lake City (Utah) Brighton
Porter Gustin, 6-5/245, Salem (Utah) Salem Hills
John Houston, 6-3/211, Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra
Cameron Smith, 6-3/225, Granite Bay (Calif.) High

2. Texas
Malik Jefferson, 6-2.5/215, Mesquite (Texas) Poteet
Anthony Wheeler, 6-2/225, Dallas (Texas) Skyline
Cameron Townsend, 6-0.5/195, Missouri City (Texas) Ridge Point
Cecil Cherry, 6-0/230, Lakeland (Fla.) Victory Christian Academy

3. Auburn
Jeffery Holland, 6-2/230, Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Acad.
Darrell Williams, 6-3/226, Birmingham (Ala.) Hoover
Richard McBryde, 6-2/210, Troy (Ala.) Charles Henderson School
Montavious Atkinson, 6-1/200, Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes

4. Notre Dame
Josh Barajas, 6-3/215, Merrillville (Ind.) Andrean
Asmar Bilal, 6-2/205, Indianapolis (Ind.) Ben Davis
Tevon Coney, 6-1/222, Palm Beach Gardens (Fla.) High
Bo Wallace, 6-5/213, New Orleans (La.) John Curtis

5. Ohio State
Justin Hilliard, 6-0/225, Cincinnati (Ohio) St. Xavier
Nick Conner, 6-3/225, Dublin (Ohio) Scioto

DEFENSIVE BACK

1. Alabama
Kendall Sheffield, 6-0/181, Missouri City (Texas) Fort Bend Marshall
Minkah Fitzpatrick, 6-1/198, Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peters Prep
Dionte Thompson, 6-2/181, Orange (Texas) West Orange-Stark
Ronnie Harrison, 6-3/205, Tallahassee (Fla.) Florida State Univ. School

2. Florida State
Derwin James, 6-2/201, Haines City (Fla.) High
Tarvarus McFadden, 6-2/198, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Amer. Heritage
Calvin Brewton, 5-11.5/172, Miami (Fla.) Central
A.J. Westbrook, 6-0/173, Daytona Beach (Fla.) Mainland

3. LSU
Kevin Toliver II, 6-2/185, Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Acad.
Xavier Lewis, 5-11/188, Reserve (La.) East St. John
Jeremy Cutrer, 6-2/170, Perkinston (Miss.) Mississippi Gulf Coast

4. Texas
Holton Hill, 6-2/184, Houston (Texas) Lamar
Kris Boyd, 5-11.5/185, Gilmer (Texas) High
DeShon Elliott, 6-1/200, Rockwall (Texas) Heath
Davante Davis, 6-3/200, Miami (Fla.) Booker T. Washington
P.J. Locke, 5-10/189, Beaumont (Texas) Central

5. USC
Iman Marshall, 6-1/190, Long Beach (Calif.) Poly
Marvell Tell, 6-1.5/188, Encino (Calif.) Crespi
Ykili Ross, 6-0.5/175, Riverside (Calif.) Polytechnic
Isaiah Langley, 5-11.5/161, Pleasanton (Calif.) Foothill

ATHLETE

1. Ohio State
Jerome Baker, 6-2/203, Cleveland (Ohio) Benedictine
Torrance Gibson, 6-4/204, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage

2. Auburn
Kerryon Johnson, 6-0/200, Madison (Ala.) Madison Academy
Jason Smith, 6-1/185, Perkinston (Miss.) Mississippi Gulf Coast C.C.
Tim Irvin, 5-8.5/194, Miami (Fla.) Westminster Christian School

3. Arizona State
Stanley Norman, 6-0/180, Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra
Jaason Lewis, 6-2/247, Virginia Beach (Va.) Ocean Lakes
Jay Jay Wilson, 6-3/228, Valencia (Calif.) High
Morie Evans, 5-10/175, Huntsville (Texas) High

4. South Carolina
Jalen Christian, 5-10/165, Damascus (Md.) High
Octavis Johnson, 6-1/181, Homerville (Ga.) Clinch County

5. Texas
DeAndre McNeal, 6-2/228, Mesquite (Texas) Poteet
Kai Locksley, 6-3/188, Baltimore (Md.) Gilman
Kirk Johnson, 6-0/205, San Jose (Calif.) Valley Christian

Photo by Doug Holleman

TCU offense changed and fit Boykin to a T

By Dennis Dodd

Coaches tie their staffs, careers, and salaries to the schemes that define them. A bad decision can alter career arcs. TCU's Gary Patterson is a defensive guy, been that way his entire career. But something was missing after a middling 11-14 two-year start in the Big 12.

Defense still had to come first because that's what Patterson does. His defenses have finished in the top 18 in total defense seven times in the past nine seasons.

But to get with it in the Big 12, he had to change dramatically. So, he changed dramatically. In a sport full of upsets, Patterson decided to pull one of the league's biggest *before* last season.

The coach finally asked himself a question: "What don't you like to defend?"

That part was easy. All he had to do was look at his new conference.

Mike Leach hasn't coached in the Big 12 for five years, but remnants of his Air Raid offense still linger all over the league, to the point where there are only a handful of Big 12 schools that *don't* use it.

But it wasn't just any offense. He needed an offense that would be able to enhance his defense.

"That was a big reason for changing the offense," Patterson said. "You can still have a tough program. (Oklahoma coach) Bobby Stoops told me this, because he's done it. You can play defense and still run this offense."

Enter the perfect fire-starters for Patterson's remodeling of his offense. Hiring co-offensive coordinators Sonny Cumbie (from Texas Tech) and Doug Meacham (from Houston) to run the spread offense was one thing. Coaching up Trevone Boykin to actually execute it was another.

And the results were dramatic.

TCU had the largest national increase in average total yards and scoring from 2013 to 2014. Boykin became only the third quarterback since 2009 to average 300 yards passing and 50 rushing. The other two won Heisman trophies — Johnny Manziel and Robert Griffin III.

Talk about turnarounds. Boykin rode the new offense — or it rode him — to a fourth-place finish in the Heisman. The Big 12 Offensive Player of the Year was No. 4 nationally in total offense throwing for 3,901 yards (eighth nationally) and 33 touchdowns (seventh).

Depending on your taste, either Boykin or Ohio State's Ezekiel Elliott go into this season as the frontrunners for the Heisman. Boykin is for sure *Lindy's Sports* 2015 Offensive Player of the Year.

He traveled only 53 miles west from his West Mesquite High School to Fort Worth, but the "long and winding road" doesn't begin to describe how the lithe 6-2, 205-pounder got to this point. In 2012 as a TCU freshman, he was tapped on the shoulder two days before the Iowa State game and told he was starting. Starter Casey Pachall was headed to rehab. At the time, Boykin was a backup tailback.

Back then, all he worried about was to "give the seniors the best season they can possibly have. And have those guys put their arms around you and say you're our guy, we believe you. We trust you no matter what you do."

Boykin struggled overall, but did throw four touchdown passes against Baylor at the end of that season. When Pachall returned in 2013, Boykin moved to receiver (finishing fourth for the Frogs). In the 2014 preseason, his quarterback days again looked numbered. Highly regarded Texas A&M transfer Matt Joeckel arrived, but didn't

win the job.

Boykin found an offense that favored his speed, decision-making and arm. Joeckel remained in the background.

"When Coach Cumbie stepped on campus and we started working, I kind of felt like, 'This is for me. This is what I want to do,'" Boykin said.

As a full-time starter in 2014, a full-flower Boykin emerged. In an 82-27 strafing of Texas Tech, he threw for a school-record seven touchdowns. West Virginia coach Dana Holgorsen called him the most improved player in college football.

Heisman buzz intensified when Boykin went for 342 yards in total offense and four total touchdowns in a November showdown against Kansas State. A head-over-heels touchdown run that night was his Heisman moment — had he won it.

"I can do black flips all day," said Boykin, admitting to a gymnastics background. "I can't do a forward flip, but I did (that night)."

Said Patterson: "For two years people have been telling him he can't play quarterback and we'd never win. He's like anybody else I know with fire in him. They're going to prove people wrong."

In the offense-rich Big 12, TCU finally had some balance. The Frogs had a top five offense that averaged 533 yards and finished only behind Baylor in the Big 12.

Turns out Coach P had more common sense than stones in changing his offense. What else would *you* do with a back-flipping, high-flying, long-tossing dual-threat Heisman contender?

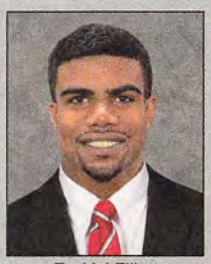
"We all knew that this was possible," Boykin said. "The coaches told us that this was possible. ... I kind of envisioned it this way.

"We kind of laugh about it, joke about it because who would have thought? Nobody was thinking last year I'd probably be up (contending) for the Heisman."

Well, that was last year.

OFFENSE

Trevone Boykin


Ezekiel Elliott

Nick Chubb

Rashard Higgins

Laquon Treadwell

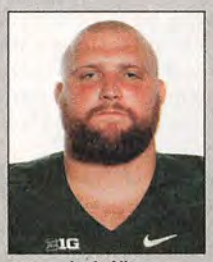
Evan Engram

FIRST TEAM

Pos	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	School
QB	Trevone Boykin	6-2	205	Sr.	TCU
RB	Ezekiel Elliott	6-0	225	Jr.	Ohio State
RB	Nick Chubb	5-10	220	So.	Georgia
WR	Rashard Higgins	6-2	188	Jr.	Colorado State
WR	Laquon Treadwell	6-2	229	Jr.	Ole Miss
TE	Evan Engram	6-3	227	Jr.	Ole Miss
C	Jack Allen	6-2	295	Sr.	Michigan State
OL	Spencer Drango	6-6	310	Sr.	Baylor
OL	Ronnie Stanley	6-5	315	Sr.	Notre Dame
OL	Taylor Decker	6-9	315	Sr.	Ohio State
OL	Laremy Tunsil	6-5	305	Jr.	Ole Miss
PK	Roberto Aguayo	6-1	204	Jr.	Florida State

SECOND TEAM

Pos	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	School
QB	Cardale Jones	6-5	250	Jr.	Ohio State
RB	Derrick Henry	6-3	242	Jr.	Alabama
RB	Royce Freeman	5-11	230	So.	Oregon
WR	Pharoh Cooper	5-11	208	Jr.	South Carolina
WR	Duke Williams	6-2	224	Sr.	Auburn
TE	Hunter Henry	6-5	250	Jr.	Arkansas
C	Max Tuerk	6-6	285	Sr.	USC
OL	Pat Elflein	6-3	300	Jr.	Ohio State
OL	Le'Raven Clark	6-6	316	Sr.	Texas Tech
OL	Cam Robinson	6-6	326	So.	Alabama
OL	Jack Conklin	6-6	317	Jr.	Michigan State
PK	Brad Craddock	6-0	189	Sr.	Maryland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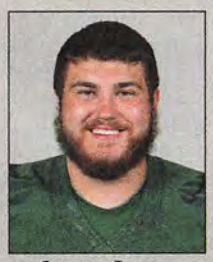

Spencer Drango

Ronnie Stanley

Taylor Decker

Laremy Tunsil

Roberto Aguayo

Photo by Joe Robbins

Bosa's NFL Future Worth More than a Shrug

By Ari Wasserman

Joey Bosa stood in the back of the crowd during Ohio State's national championship celebration at the White House in April.

President Barack Obama, who was offering many kind words to the team, had heard about the defensive end's signature move — the Bosa Shrug, a comically understated post-sack celebration. Obama wanted to see it.

So when the Prez paused in his talk, turned and made eye contact with Bosa, there was only one thing to do. Bosa put his arms out to the side and shrugged his shoulders. A second later, Obama re-enacted it.

Bosa laughed and gave a fist pump.

When the President of the United States does the Bosa Shrug ... well, let's just say life is pretty dang good right now for the Ohio State junior.

Bosa is the Florida boy who became the face of Ohio State's defense; the sack master who terrorized opposing offenses before becoming a unanimous first-team All-American; the quiet, yet funny personality who puts himself out there on social media; perhaps the most dominant defender in college football.

There's one more thing. Bosa is also the NFL-ready player who is only still in college because he has to be. If he wasn't, he would have enjoyed his time at the NFL Draft a week or so after the White House visit.

College is Bosa's inescapable reality for at least another year. He is entering his junior season, trapped in a world where he really has nothing left to prove. So what could possibly be next for him?

Well, for one thing, nothing about Bosa will look like he feels trapped in the Buckeyes' defense. Opposing offenses should be so lucky.

"I think he should be the best defensive lineman in America," Ohio State coach Urban Meyer said. "He's got a tremendous work ethic. He and (defensive line coach Larry) Johnson have tremendous chemistry right now, the way they're working. He's trying to take his game to the next level, which we all know is pretty high."

The next level? Meyer is talking about a player who had 13 sacks as a sophomore, which was only one short of the single-season Ohio State record set by Vernon Gholston in 2007.

The next level means becoming the most prolific sacker in Ohio State history — Mike Vrabel holds the record at 36 — and putting himself in the conversation to be the No. 1 overall pick in the 2016 NFL Draft.

Being a top-five pick is very likely, and getting to No. 1 could be reasonable. The last three defensive ends to be selected first in the NFL Draft were Courtney Brown (2000), Mario Williams (2006) and Jadeveon Clowney (2013).

Bosa is that good. He just doesn't like talking about specifics.

"I have my goals set," Bosa said. "Just to get better and be a great team this year again. I feel like if I just go out

and work every day, everything will fall into place. I obviously hear about (the NFL Draft stuff) and see it around, but it doesn't really get to my head."

Being in this situation would seemingly create a lot of pressure. Fear of injury, overuse or lack of production could all creep into Bosa's head as he plays through one more grueling season (read: 15 games, all the way to the end) before his big payday.

But there's a certain beauty about Meyer's team, a kind of bliss among the Buckeyes' best players. Take quarterback Cardale Jones, the third-stringer unexpectedly thrust into the starting role for Ohio State's postseason run. He never acknowledged — or perhaps even realized — what was resting on his shoulders. Then the Buckeyes won the national title.

Bosa isn't a quarterback, but he has the same trait. He doesn't act like he's thinking about the NFL or the sacks record or what could get in his way of making a ton of money.

You know, he just shrugs.

"You never hear him say he's going to be the first pick or anything like that," senior defensive tackle Adolphus Washington said. "Everybody knows what he could be, but you never hear him talking about it and never hear him bragging about it. He just wants to go out there and play football with us."

The 6-6, 275-pounder won't take plays off or hold back to guard against injuries — "That won't happen," Johnson said — as he prepares for the season to help lead the preseason No. 1 Buckeyes right back to the College Football Playoff.

Perhaps his down-to-earth mentality is because he "gets" all of this — he's the son of John Bosa, a former NFL player, and he went to a Florida high school powerhouse, St. Thomas Aquinas in Fort Lauderdale. He has the right mindset of taking football seriously, but not himself too seriously.

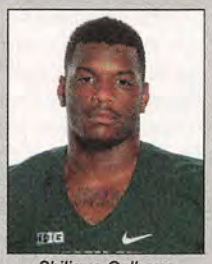
As for what's next? Well, Meyer wants and expects more, of course. But it's hard to fathom what more will look like.

"We'll write the story at the end of the season," Johnson said. "He has a chance to be a really special player."

DEFENSE

Joey Bosa

Shawn Oakman


Shilique Calhoun

Adolphus Washington

Jaylon Smith

Scooby Wright

FIRST TEAM

Pos	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	School
DL	Joey Bosa	6-6	275	Jr.	Ohio State
DL	Shawn Oakman	6-9	280	Sr.	Baylor
DL	Shilique Calhoun	6-5	250	Sr.	Michigan State
DL	Adolphus Washington	6-4	290	Sr.	Ohio State
LB	Jaylon Smith	6-2	235	Jr.	Notre Dame
LB	Scooby Wright	6-1	246	Jr.	Arizona
LB	Reggie Ragland	6-2	252	Sr.	Alabama
DB	Vernon Hargreaves III	5-11	198	Jr.	Florida
DB	Jalen Ramsey	6-1	201	Jr.	Florida State
DB	Kendall Fuller	6-0	197	Jr.	Virginia Tech
DB	Karl Joseph	5-11	197	Sr.	West Virginia
P	JK Scott	6-5	195	So.	Alabama

SECOND TEAM

Pos	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	School
DL	Myles Garrett	6-5	270	So.	Texas A&M
DL	Emmanuel Ogbah	6-4	275	Jr.	Oklahoma State
DL	Robert Nkemdiche	6-4	280	Jr.	Ole Miss
DL	A'Shawn Robinson	6-4	312	Jr.	Alabama
LB	Eric Striker	6-0	223	Sr.	Oklahoma
LB	Su'a Cravens	6-1	225	Jr.	USC
LB	Myles Jack	6-1	232	Jr.	UCLA
DB	Zack Sanchez	5-11	175	Jr.	Oklahoma
DB	Jeremy Cash	6-2	205	Sr.	Duke
DB	Ishmael Adams	5-8	190	Jr.	UCLA
DB	Vonn Bell	5-11	205	Jr.	Ohio State
P	Tom Hackett	5-11	195	Sr.	Utah

Reggie Ragland

Vernon Hargreaves III

Jalen Ramsey

Kendall Fuller

Karl Joseph

JK Scott

QUARTERBACKS

Dak Attack: QB Prescott Takes Aim at SEC Title

Quarterback Dak Prescott is already the best Mississippi State player. Ever. He finished eighth in last year's Heisman Trophy voting as a junior and set 12 single-season school records.

And that success placed a target on his back.

The quarterback traveled to Panama City Beach, Fla., during spring break. He returned to Starkville with minor injuries. Prescott and two teammates were allegedly attacked by a group of men due to their status as MSU football players.

"It's life. There's perks to it; obviously, there's the negative side to it," Prescott said. "So it's just about being the best person I can, just live the life that's handed to me and make the most out of it."

DAK PRESCOTT

Photo by Michael Wade

No. 15 is also a target on the field, but Prescott enters his final season with eyes wide open.

He returned as a senior, vowing to improve upon Mississippi State's 10-win regular season and trip to the Orange Bowl. The team lost its two best defenders — linebacker Benardrick McKinney and defensive lineman Preston Smith — so the burden falls on Prescott's shoulder pads if the Bulldogs are to eclipse their best season ever.

"People still doubt us, that we won't come out this year and we won't do the same, or we won't get any better," Prescott said. "Our aspirations are only to be better ... and finish the season off that we didn't quite do last year."

Did we mention the No. 15?

As a college quarterback, in terms of size, ability and style, many have compared the 6-2, 230-pound Prescott to another No. 15 — former Florida Heisman winner Tim Tebow. That's a compliment. And know this: Prescott, even though he might not have been projected as a first-rounder in the 2015 draft, is an overall much better prospect than Tebow was (or ended up being) ... it's just minus all the other noise that went with the ex-Gator.

Auburn coach Gus Malzahn said Prescott has "some similarities" to another Heisman winner — Auburn's own Cam Newton, due to the Prescott's physical style and ability to pick up tough yards on the ground.

Prescott averaged 4.7 yards per carry while rushing for 986 yards and 14 touchdowns last season. He completed 244 of 396 passes for 3,449 yards, with 27 touchdowns and 11 interceptions, showing improvement in his accuracy. NFL.com analyst Gil Brandt, after studying the quarterback on tape, wrote in November that Prescott might have been the most improved player in college football.

Mostly, though, Mississippi State just loves Dak because he's Dak.

Coaches and players live through his belief. They point to his leadership in the 2013 Egg Bowl. Prescott hadn't played in three weeks. He entered the game in the fourth quarter against in-state rival Ole Miss and ignited a comeback win.

They look to his record five touchdowns in the 2013 Liberty Bowl, and to his guidance of Mississippi State last season to its first-ever No. 1 ranking.

"Here's a guy that knows what it takes when you're on the field to go win," MSU coach Dan Mullen said.

"We're probably the only sport in the world that the three months leading into the season the coaches can't be around the players with a ball on the field. ... So you need a guy like (Dak), that's going to make sure we continue to improve as a unit and as a team throughout the summer months."

Prescott arrived on campus five years ago a somewhat anonymous three-star prospect among a mediocre list of signees. Now, he's being looked to as the man who could bring Mississippi State its first SEC championship since 1941.

MSU has tried to make the leap countless times before and failed. Prescott gets a final shot.

"Five years ago I was just starting off. It's special," he said. "So to think I'm that old, it's a little surreal.

"But I'm enjoying every minute of it, just trying to make sure I lead guys and put everybody in the position they need to be in."

— Michael Bonner

TOP QUARTERBACKS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Trevone Boykin** Another monster year at hand, given talented cast, 2nd year in system.	Sr.	TCU
2.	**Cardale Jones** Those three starts were about as good as anybody has ever seen.	Jr.	Ohio State
3.	**Dak Prescott** Put up 341.2 yards per game of tough-guy total offense in '14.	Sr.	Mississippi State
4.	**Deshaun Watson** We believe: A full season of Watson will lead Tigers to ACC title.	So.	Clemson
5.	**Cody Kessler** Getting back to normal: A USC QB is the Pac-12's top Heisman candidate.	Sr.	USC
6.	**J.T. Barrett** Just saying ... If he were the starting QB, he'd be ranked right about here.	So.	Ohio State
7.	**Connor Cook** A throw-back pro-styler who is 24-3 as a starter in past two seasons.	Sr.	Michigan State
8.	**Justin Thomas** Triple-option wiz ran for 1,086 yards in leading Tech to ACC title game.	Jr.	Georgia Tech
9.	**Taysom Hill** Can do it all when healthy, which hasn't been enough of the time.	Sr.	BYU
10.	**Jared Goff** Strong-armed and few better mechanically; 7,481 passing yards already.	Jr.	Cal
11.	**Braxton Miller** Clipboard carrier or something else? Would be wrong to exclude him here.	Sr.	Ohio State
12.	**Christian Hackenberg** Sophomore results were mixed — too many sacks — but pros still love him.	Jr.	Penn State
13.	**Gunner Kiel** Former 5-star carved up Ohio State, has 8th-best returning efficiency.	Jr.	Cincinnati
14.	**Josh Dobbs** He brims with the "it" factor; Vols averaged 36.7 pts in his six games in '14.	Jr.	Tennessee
15.	**Keenan Reynolds** Hats off to Reynolds, whose 64 rushing TDs most ever for an FBS QB.	Sr.	Navy
16.	**Jeremy Johnson** He's a freak athlete who should launch immediately in Malzahn attack.	Jr.	Auburn
17.	**Marquise Williams** Often took a beating last season, played hurt, still had 3,856 total yards.	Sr.	North Carolina
18.	**Brad Kaaya** Had a 145.9 passing efficiency rating as a freshman. That's good, right?	So.	Miami
19.	**Kevin Hogan** Re-found groove in second half of last season; still has an NFL profile.	Sr.	Stanford
20.	**Vernon Adams** Assume Eastern Washington transfer wins job, and that he'll be just fine.	Sr.	Oregon
21.	**Mason Rudolph** Pulled from redshirt, his 3 games, including Bedlam win, tease greatness.	So.	Oklahoma State
22.	**Jacoby Brissett** Dual-threat Florida transfer picked off just five times in 370 throws.	Sr.	NC State
23.	**Brandon Doughty** Can't ignore 4,830 yards, 49 TDs, 10 INTs, 167.1 efficiency rating.	Sr.	Western Kentucky
24.	**Seth Russell** With his arm and athleticism, heir apparent won't miss a Baylor beat.	Jr.	Baylor
25.	**Paxton Lynch** 6-7 junior passed for more than 3,000 yards, rushed for 13 scores.	Jr.	Memphis

RUNNING BACKS

Versatile Freeman Ready to Soar for Ducks

Marcus Mariota is gone, but Oregon still has a dynamic player in the backfield capable of striking the Heisman Trophy pose.

Royce Freeman, who rushed for 1,365 yards and 18 touchdowns as a true freshman, headlines an impressive group of running backs for the new starting quarterback to lean on this fall as the Ducks reload for another run at the College Football Playoff.

ROYCE FREEMAN

Photo by Dave Sizer

During spring practice, the coaching staff challenged Freeman to become a more vocal leader and gave him some reps at slot receiver, with the idea of putting him and junior running back Thomas Tyner on the field at the same time in certain situations.

"I was blessed to be able to go that far and I'm just hungry for more," Freeman said of emerging as the featured back on an Oregon team that won the Pac-12 and pummeled Florida State in the Rose Bowl before losing to Ohio State in the first national title game of the playoff era.

"Especially since that was my first year, I feel like I'm going to get better and accomplish more."

During the 2013 season, Byron Marshall led Oregon with 1,038 yards rushing and 14 touchdowns. Last season — due to Freeman's impressive fall camp and a lack of depth at wide receiver — Marshall mostly switched positions and led the Ducks with 1,003 yards receiving.

Freeman, who had 16 catches out of the backfield for 158 yards and a touchdown, will still be used primarily at running back. Offensive coordinator Scott Frost also will have to find enough touches for Tyner (1,284 yards and 14 touchdowns in 23 games played) and speedy redshirt sophomore Tony Brooks-James.

"Royce obviously had a good year, but he's got some things he needs to improve on. We're going to give him a little bit bigger role this coming year," longtime running backs coach Gary Campbell said. "He's learning some things out at the wide receiver slot position, so we can get him and Thomas in there at the same time and be able to do some things with two running backs."

In addition to losing Mariota, Oregon must replace All-American center Hroniss Grasu, left tackle Jake Fisher and reliable left guard Hamani Stevens along the offensive line.

The team is counting on Freeman to help rally the Ducks, despite his youth and quiet demeanor.

"(Freeman's) in the long line of Marcus and Hroniss and guys that are just unbelievably great guys but too quiet for the overall greater good," said third-year Oregon head coach Mark Helfrich. "Just initiating a little more vocal leadership is something we've challenged him to do, and he's been phenomenal at practice."

Freeman's extraordinary season ended with a thud. The 5-11, 230-pound workhorse had only 10 carries for 22 yards during the 42-20 loss to Ohio State, while Ezekiel Elliott shredded the Ducks for 246 yards and four touchdowns.

"They were a great team. They're the best team I've played so far in my football career. They came out, they executed well and we didn't execute well at all," Freeman said. "They played more physical and they played better overall. There's things we need to work on."

Oregon is expected to contend again, with either Eastern Washington graduate transfer Vernon Adams or junior Jeff Lockie replacing Mariota behind center.

But a more experienced and motivated Freeman might be the Ducks' next Heisman contender and the player who pulls the team to those lofty heights.

"He's playing faster right now than he did last year," Frost said. "I think he's probably gotten a little faster, but he's also playing faster because of confidence. He's starting to be a real leader for us, too."

— Ryan Thorburn

TOP RUNNING BACKS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Ezekiel Elliott**	Jr.	Ohio State
	After magical postseason, won Sullivan Award as nation's top amateur.		
2.	**Nick Chubb**	So.	Georgia
	Bowling ball runs over defenders, doesn't tire, speed is underrated.		
3.	**Derrick Henry**	Jr.	Alabama
	Becomes Tide's top playmaker; that awaited breakout season is at hand.		
4.	**Royce Freeman**	So.	Oregon
	Looked ever quicker this spring, which doesn't much seem fair.		
5.	**Leonard Fournette**	So.	LSU
	Crank up the Heisman hype, for real. For sure, Notre Dame believes.		
6.	**Samaje Perine**	So.	Oklahoma
	Had FBS record 427 yards vs. Kansas on way to 1,713-yard season.		
7.	**Dalvin Cook**	So.	Florida State
	Top-flight vision and quickness; putting Rose Bowl fumbles behind him.		
8.	**James Conner**	So.	Pittsburgh
	With no help from passing game, 250-pounder bulled for 1,765 yards.		
9.	**Donnel Pumphrey**	Jr.	San Diego State
	Legit enough to rank higher, but have you seen the guys ranked higher?		
10.	**Paul Perkins**	Jr.	UCLA
	Somehow, his 1,575 yards were deemed 'quiet.' Pac-12 foes know better.		
11.	**Alex Collins**	Jr.	Arkansas
	Explosive runner looking for his third consecutive 1,000-yard season.		
12.	**Corey Clement**	Jr.	Wisconsin
	Next man up in Badgers' pipeline; rushed for 949 yards last season.		
13.	**Nick Wilson**	So.	Arizona
	Ran for 1,375 yards while missing all or part of four games to injury.		
14.	**Devontae Booker**	Sr.	Utah
	Augmented his 1,512 rushing yards with 43 receptions for 306 yards.		
15.	**Shock Linwood**	Jr.	Baylor
	Did his part on nation's top offense: 1,252 yards and 16 touchdowns.		
16.	**Jonathan Williams**	Sr.	Arkansas
	You know he's good for a grand. What if he didn't have to split carries?		
17.	**Devon Johnson**	Sr.	Marshall
	Led the nation with 8.58 yards per carry; can Herd be as explosive?		
18.	**DeAndre Washington**	Sr.	Texas Tech
	Under the radar while becoming first Tech back since '98 with 1,000 yards.		
19.	**Thomas Tyner**	Jr.	Oregon
	Has to fight for enough carries, but we still have a bit of a crush on him.		
20.	**Jalen Hurd**	So.	Tennessee
	Had 899 yards as freshman; will be part of dynamite combo (Alvin Kamara).		
21.	**Jarvion Franklin**	So.	Western Michigan
	First to be MAC Rookie of Year and Offensive POY in same season.		
22.	**Justin Jackson**	So.	Northwestern
	In shadow of other Big Ten backs in '14, but ran for 1,187 yards, 10 TDs.		
23.	**Kareem Hunt**	Jr.	Toledo
	Nation's third-leading rusher last season, 163.1 yards per game.		
24.	**Aaron Green**	Sr.	TCU
	Nicely moved to the head of TCU's committee of RBs late last year.		
25.	**Kelvin Taylor**	Jr.	Florida
	A flyer: He'll thrive in new O, even though UF has other good RB options.		

RECEIVERS

Quick Recovery Gives WR Treadwell, Rebels Hope

LAQUON TREADWELL

Photo by AP Photo/Aaron M. Sprecher

In that moment, everything seemed lost for Ole Miss — and not just the game against SEC West rival Auburn and a chance at the College Football Playoff.

Wide receiver Laquon Treadwell, one of the team's most important players, laid in the end zone of a silent Vaught-Hemingway Stadium, an ankle dislocated, fibula fractured, the injuries suffered while trying to score a potential game-winning touchdown.

That was November 1. And it was heartbreaking.

But by January 21, Treadwell posted Instagram videos showing him running on a treadmill. A month later, he was on the field turf in the team's indoor practice facility. He dressed for the team's spring game, even though coach Hugh Freeze had already made the call that his preseason All-American receiver was not going to play.

Still, it was all so encouraging. How did Treadwell, now a junior, recover so quickly from an injury that at the time felt tragic?

From the moment he was carried off the field, into an ambulance and toward surgery, Treadwell had one thought: "How long is it going to take for me to get back?"

"From the first night, I knew he was already focused on things in the training room," said tight end and friend Evan Engram. "I don't think he missed one little thing and was always on time to everything. I wasn't surprised at all to see him back on the field when he was, because that was his dedication and his love for the game."

Said Freeze: "Everybody who has wisdom in that tells me that everything looks great."

As much as the 6-2 Treadwell wanted to do everything his teammates did this spring, he was realistic about his own health — estimating he played at 80 to 85 percent of his full potential in March. Treadwell played his sophomore season at 229 pounds but was closer to 210 this spring because of the injury. For a physical receiver, those extra pounds can help him push through tacklers. He expects to gain back the pounds.

"There's a little hesitation. I'm not 100 percent, but I'm getting better every day," Treadwell said.

Assuming he's 100 percent by August, Treadwell is primed to have a huge season, which likely would be his last before departing for the NFL, where he's considered a top 2016 draft prospect. Treadwell, the nation's No. 1 wide receiver in the high school class of 2013, caught 48 passes for 632 yards and five touchdowns in nine games last season. Even those numbers don't really reflect his potential.

He had 10 catches for 103 yards and a touchdown against Auburn, his third 100-yard receiving game of the season, and he was sensational in the second half of a comeback win against Alabama.

Treadwell caught 72 passes as a freshman, but his low yards-per-catch average (8.44) fueled doubters. He proved most of them wrong in 2014; despite missing the final four games, he still finished ninth in the Southeastern Conference in catches and in the top 15 in yards and touchdowns.

Ole Miss, after Treadwell's injury, suffered losses to Arkansas and TCU, proving his impact on the team — not only on the field, but also off it. Treadwell grabbed a leadership role last season, going so far as to do the required push-ups with any receiver who drops a pass in practice.

"It was a learning process, for the most part," Treadwell said of the end of the season. "It happened, and I grew up. I learned from it, and the team went through a lot. There's a better focus with the team now than there was last year."

— Hugh Kellenberger

TOP WIDE RECEIVERS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Rashard Higgins**	Jr.	**Colorado State**
	Led nation with 1,750 receiving yards and 17 touchdowns last season.		
2.	**Laquon Treadwell**	Jr.	**Ole Miss**
	Big, physical WR well on his way back from gruesome leg/ankle injury.		
3.	**Pharoh Cooper**	Jr.	**South Carolina**
	His SEC-best 1,136 receiving yards in 2014 just part of do-it-all skills.		
4.	**Duke Williams**	Sr.	**Auburn**
	Could very well be the first WR off the board in the 2016 NFL Draft.		
5.	**Tyler Boyd**	Jr.	**Pittsburgh**
	Two-year totals of 163 catches for 2,435 yards and 15 touchdowns.		
6.	**Sterling Shepard**	Sr.	**Oklahoma**
	Sooners dearly missed his explosive playmaking when hurt late in 2014.		
7.	**Will Fuller**	Jr.	**Notre Dame**
	Emerged as star of unit last season with 76 catches, 15 for TDs.		
8.	**Nelson Spruce**	Sr.	**Colorado**
	Had monster year (106-1,198) following in Paul Richardson's footsteps.		
9.	**Mike Williams**	Jr.	**Clemson**
	Fantastic deep threat even more dangerous with Watson as full-time QB.		
10.	**Corey Coleman**	Jr.	**Baylor**
	Missed first three games, still finished with 1,119 yards, 11 TDs.		
11.	**Michael Thomas**	Jr.	**Ohio State**
	No OSU WR has hit 1,000 yards since 2002. That streak will end now.		
12.	**Josh Doctson**	Sr.	**TCU**
	Big target hauled in 65 passes for 1,018 yards and 11 TDs last season.		
13.	**De'Runnya Wilson**	Jr.	**Mississippi State**
	Tall, lengthy receiver just beginning to reach his really high ceiling.		
14.	**Cayleb Jones**	Jr.	**Arizona**
	Ex-Longhorn became big go-to target in first season with Wildcats.		
15.	**Leonte Carroo**	Sr.	**Rutgers**
	Hopes chemistry with new QB results in about 20 yards per catch again.		
16.	**KD Cannon**	So.	**Baylor**
	Speedy soph ended rookie season with 197 yards vs. Michigan State.		
17.	**Josh Reynolds**	Jr.	**Texas A&M**
	Rangy target was A&M's offensive MVP (52 catches, 842 yards, 13 TDs).		
18.	**Corey Davis**	Jr.	**Western Michigan**
	First-team All-MAC last season (78 catches, 1,408 yards, 15 touchdowns).		
19.	**Byron Marshall**	Sr.	**Oregon**
	Went from 1,000 yards rushing in 2013 to 1,000 yards receiving in 2014.		
20.	**Artavis Scott**	So.	**Clemson**
	Rookie season of 76 catches for 965 yards and eight touchdowns.		

TOP TIGHT ENDS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Evan Engram**	Jr.	**Ole Miss**
	All-SEC as a sophomore, tormented Mississippi State in Egg Bowl.		
2.	**Hunter Henry**	Jr.	**Arkansas**
	Helps with all the Hogs' running, and made 38 catches for 513 yards in '14.		
3.	**Austin Hooper**	So.	**Stanford**
	Stanford TE tradition is back: 40 catches for 499 yards last season.		
4.	**Bucky Hodges**	So.	**Virginia Tech**
	Set school TE record with 45 catches for 526 yards, seven TDs last year.		
5.	**Steven Scheu**	Sr.	**Vanderbilt**
	Full-service tight end earned second-team All-SEC honors from AP.		

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

ND's Stanley Primed for 13 Bowl-level Efforts

Ronnie Stanley arrived for interviews following his final spring game dressed in a yellow tank top. He sat in the front row of Notre Dame's football auditorium, letting his "ND Family" tattoo show, inked after the BCS National Championship Game three years ago.

TOP CENTERS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Jack Allen** Was only non-senior among six Rimington finalists last season.	Sr.	Michigan State
2.	**Max Tuerk** All-Pac-12 as a junior and leader of maturing, talented USC line.	Sr.	USC
3.	**Nick Martin** Spent most of last season at guard, but his home is right in the middle.	Sr.	Notre Dame
4.	**Evan Boehm** Has made 40 consecutive starts and been to two SEC title games.	Sr.	Missouri
5.	**Ryan Kelly** Third-year starter gives the Alabama line plenty of stability.	Sr.	Alabama
6.	**Mike Matthews** A pro prospect, like just about everyone else in his family.	Sr.	Texas A&M
7.	**Jake Brendel** Fourth-year starter earned second-team All-Pac-12 honors last season.	Sr.	UCLA
8.	**Joey Hunt** 26-game starter, second-team all-league, helps kick Frogs into gear.	Sr.	TCU

TOP GUARDS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Pat Elflein** All-Big Ten returnee is proud leader of what OSU calls "The Slobs."	Jr.	Ohio State
2.	**Christian Westerman** Former 5-star recruit and Auburn transfer is a powerful run blocker.	Sr.	Arizona State
3.	**Landon Turner** Third-team All-ACC; had five games with 10-plus knockdown blocks.	Sr.	North Carolina
4.	**Greg Pyke** Becoming one of best in SEC; was a 295-pound HS lacrosse player.	Jr.	Georgia
5	**Joshua Garnett** No worries about Stanford's left side, with Garnett and OT Kyle Murphy.	Sr.	Stanford
6.	**Wyatt Teller** Ex-DL emerged on Tech's OL last season, he'll push for All-ACC honors.	So.	Virginia Tech

TOP TACKLES

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Spencer Drango** First-team All-American and semifinalist for the Outland last year.	Sr.	Baylor
2.	**Ronnie Stanley** Allowed just one sack last season as a 13-game starter at LT.	Sr.	Notre Dame
3.	**Taylor Decker** Buzz was he could have been a first-rounder had he left after last year.	Sr.	Ohio State
4.	**Laremy Tunsil** All the talent; getting healthy again after leg/ankle injury in bowl game.	Jr.	Ole Miss
5.	**Le'Raven Clark** Has started 38 games, helps pave a run attack that can't be overlooked.	Sr.	Texas Tech
6.	**Cam Robinson** Was first true frosh to start at LT for Nick Saban; now, he's the anchor.	So.	Alabama
7.	**Jack Conklin** Was impressive vs. Shawn Oakman in Cotton Bowl win over Baylor.	Jr.	Michigan State
8.	**Cody Whitehair** Is a two-time second-team All-Big 12 selection for the Wildcats.	Sr.	Kansas State
9.	**Kyle Murphy** Of course, a Cardinal is on this list. Of course, he's an NFL prospect.	Sr.	Stanford
10.	**Tyler Marz** Ohio State DE Joey Bosa said Marz might have been best he saw in '14.	Sr.	Wisconsin

Photo by AP Photo/Kevin Reece

RONNIE STANLEY

The star left tackle acted like he owned the place, which is just fine by Brian Kelly.

Hours earlier, Notre Dame's head coach called a pass play for the 6-6, 315-pound dancing bear that gained 14 yards and flattened cornerback Cole Luke. It was a parting gift from Kelly, one Stanley had earned during the previous four months, leading a dominant performance in the Music City Bowl, making a surprise return for his senior year and leading the offensive line through spring ball.

Stanley had begun to act like a professional. He was just doing it in college.

"That's beneficial to him, that's beneficial to us," offensive line coach Harry Hiestand said in the spring. "That's something as he got more confident in what he was doing, he could let that great talent that he has come out on every single snap."

That's pretty much what happened when Notre Dame ran 51 times on LSU in its bowl upset, matching the high mark of the Kelly era. The Irish mashed the Tigers' talented front seven with a first-time starting quarterback in Malik Zaire, who ultimately won Music City Bowl MVP honors. But it was Stanley who carried the bowl trophy out of the locker room afterward.

Stanley wants to carry a bigger trophy after his final season while leading a bigger Irish line that returns four starters from the Music City Bowl. Any carry-over success could test Kelly's preferred pass-first approach.

Stanley hopes it does.

"Just having the ability to run when we want to run the ball and to go at the pace we'd like to go as an offense, I do think that's a big change in identity from the year previous to now," Stanley said. "We know that if we want to be a championship football team we're going to have to run the football when it matters."

Notre Dame rarely did that last year with a middling run game so ineffective that Kelly shuffled four positions after three games. Stanley was the only lineman to keep his job, continuing as heir apparent to left tackle Zack Martin, who went in the first round of the 2014 NFL Draft and made the Pro Bowl as a rookie.

Stanley's pro prospects could hit similar heights if he continues to build on a strong offseason. He received a second-round grade from the league's advisory committee on underclassmen; not as high as he wanted, but also a message that he had not delivered enough even performances.

What is he focused on?

"Eliminating all the questions of whether I can do it for the whole game or just a few plays here or there," Stanley said. "I think I'm improving on being more physical and dominating, but I think I've done that before."

The level Stanley showed in the bowl was a performance powerful enough to change the trajectory of his career and Notre Dame's 2015 season.

That was part of the pitch Kelly and Hiestand delivered to Stanley when they flew to his home in Las Vegas to re-recruit him last January. Now the left tackle is so comfortable back in South Bend that he's lobbied his head coach for more action in the passing game beyond protecting the quarterback.

Based on his one spring game reception, cornerbacks and safeties, beware.

"Guaranteed first down," Stanley said. "I'll give you 50-percent touchdowns, too. Next time I'll score."

— Pete Sampson

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

Baylor's Oakman Delays NFL for 'Unfinished Business'

SHAWN OAKMAN

Photo by Doug Holleman

Baylor defensive coordinator Phil Bennett and defensive end Shawn Oakman go back a long way. When Oakman was playing at Penn Wood High School in Lansdowne, Pa., Bennett recruited him while serving as Pitt's defensive coordinator.

Oakman collected 33 sacks during his last two years of high school, and Bennett knew the player could star at the college level.

"His uncle brought him to the University of Pittsburgh," Bennett said. "It was a Saturday and I lived right by the complex. Dave Wannstedt said, 'Get down here.' He was imposing, and I thought, 'Wow, I can work with that.'"

Oakman was also a physical presence in the paint for a Penn Wood basketball team that won the 2009 state championship and was the state runner-up in 2010.

"I was too aggressive," he said of playing basketball. "That's why I'm playing football right now."

The 6-9, 280-pound Oakman opted for Penn State but was dismissed after two years, in the spring of 2012, following a confrontation with a store clerk at a campus convenience store after his student meal card had run out.

Penn State defensive line coach Larry Johnson reached out to Baylor safeties coach Brian Norwood, who had coached defensive backs for the Nittany Lions from 2001-07. Bennett was thrilled to get a chance to coach Oakman after seeing him as a high school player.

"I said, 'Oh, I know him,' and it sort of fell into place," Bennett said. "The day he came down here it had to be 110 degrees. I said, 'This is not Philadelphia.'"

Oakman sat out the 2012 season because of transfer rules. When he regained his eligibility in 2013, Oakman was already 21 years old and hadn't played a down of college football.

Playing behind senior defensive ends Chris McAllister and Terrance Lloyd, Oakman put up solid numbers as a third-year sophomore, collecting 12.5 tackles for loss, two sacks and a fumble recovery.

"You sit out for so many years and wonder if you've still got it," Oakman said. "In my first few games, I didn't have it. I came along slowly, but surely. I feel I came a long way, but I still see myself growing every day."

After a tremendous junior year — 11 sacks, 19.5 tackles for loss, three fumble recoveries — he's one of the top defensive ends in the country with his eyes set on being one of the highest NFL draft picks next year.

Projected as a first-round pick had he declared early, Oakman surprised even many of his teammates when he announced before the Cotton Bowl that he would return.

"My future is promising on both sides of the NFL and college," he said. "But I have unfinished business. Looking at my body of work, it's not good enough for me to leave. The way I see it now is I haven't done anything spectacular. All the pieces have got to fall into place."

Bennett predicts Oakman will be one of the first picks in the 2016 draft, like defensive linemen Jadeveon Clowney and Ndamukong Suh were in recent seasons.

"You can look a year from now and you're talking about a Clowney or one of those guys like Suh or (J.J.) Watt, where he will test well and play well," Bennett said. "He's made progress, but he's not where he's going to be. I've told him this and I'm honest with him. Another year is what he needs."

Though he made third-team All-American, Oakman wants to become a more consistent player after disappearing during some stretches last season.

"There are plays that I completely dominate, but at the same time I could dominate every play," Oakman said. "I just have to keep doing what I'm doing and work on technique and fundamentals."

— John Werner

TOP DEFENSIVE ENDS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Joey Bosa**	Jr.	Ohio State
	Even President Obama is doing the Joey Bosa celebration shrug.		
2.	**Shawn Oakman**	Sr.	Baylor
	At the top of the list of guys you never, ever, want to mess with.		
3.	**Shilique Calhoun**	Sr.	Michigan State
	Nice surprise to see Shilique The Freak back after All-America nods.		
4.	**Myles Garrett**	So.	Texas A&M
	And now, with the No. 1 pick in the 2017 NFL Draft ...		
5.	**Emmanuel Ogbah**	Jr.	Oklahoma State
	Big 12 Defensive Lineman of the Year, had 17 tackles for loss, 11 sacks.		
6.	**Carl Lawson**	So.	Auburn
	So, so ready to hit beast mode after ACL tear wreaked 2014.		
7.	**DeForest Buckner**	Sr.	Oregon
	Size (6-7, 290) and athleticism at end; came on strong late last season.		
8.	**Curt Maggitt**	Sr.	Tennessee
	His return was big for UT, for his production and vocal leadership.		
9.	**Derek Barnett**	So.	Tennessee
	Had 10 sacks as a true frosh; he and Maggitt combined for 35.5 TFLs.		
10.	**Shaq Lawson**	Jr.	Clemson
	Tigers lose Vic Beasley to the NFL; here is the next Vic Beasley.		
11.	**Dadi Nicolas**	Sr.	Virginia Tech
	Second-team All-ACC last season with 18.5 TFLs and nine sacks.		
12.	**Kamalei Correa**	Jr.	Boise State
	Last of his 12 sacks came on final play to preserve Fiesta Bowl victory.		
13.	**Bronson Kaufusi**	Sr.	BYU
	At 6-7, 265 is a big hybrid DE/OLB who can cover and rush (7 sacks).		
14.	**Hunter Dimick**	Jr.	Utah
	Had 10 sacks in '14; trying for more without Nate Orchard on other side.		

TOP DEFENSIVE TACKLES

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Adolphus Washington**	Sr.	Ohio State
	Moving from nose guard to defensive tackle will boost his stats.		
2.	**Robert Nkemdiche**	Jr.	Ole Miss
	Ex-No. 1 recruit is a mismatch (size, quickness) vs. interior linemen.		
3.	**A'Shawn Robinson**	Jr.	Alabama
	Absolutely swallows up space as key man in Nick Saban's 3-man front.		
4.	**Andrew Billings**	Jr.	Baylor
	He's All-Big 12, strong as a bull, 300 pounds and runs a sub 5-second 40.		
5.	**Anthony Zettel**	Sr.	Penn State
	Had 17 tackles for loss, including eight sacks, in All-Big Ten season.		
6.	**Harold Brantley**	Jr.	Missouri
	Gary Pinkel compares him to ex-Tiger star DL Sheldon Richardson.		
7.	**Sheldon Day**	Sr.	Notre Dame
	Brian Kelly loves his "work volume." Day can go, well, all day.		
8.	**Kenny Clark**	Jr.	UCLA
	2nd-team all-leaguer forms tough interior combo with Eddie Vanderdoes.		
9.	**Montravius Adams**	Jr.	Auburn
	Leader of reloaded Auburn front; can get pressure up the middle.		
10.	**Luther Maddy**	Sr.	Virginia Tech
	Coming back from knee injury; had 13.5 tackles for loss in 2013.		

LINEBACKERS

What Will Arizona's Scooby Do for an Encore?

SCOOBY WRIGHT

Photo by Casey Sapio-USA TODAY Sports

Arizona often holds practice at the school's former baseball stadium, across the street from the main football facilities. The outfield wall still stands, the batter's eye in center field now covered with a tarp depicting UA football's greatest players, including four College Football Hall of Fame defenders — Ricky Hunley, Chuck Cecil, Rob Waldrop and Tedy Bruschi.

Linebacker Scooby Wright, only a junior, is eligible to join that mural of All-Americans and major award winners ... a slice of glory that could be a bit awkward for a guy who prefers to play the reluctant superstar.

"They were going to put my thing up there," Wright said of the coaches, "and I told them if they did, I was going to burn it down. I told them they are going to have to wait until I leave."

He has at least one more season after winning just about everything there was to be won as an out-of-nowhere sophomore, taking home the Chuck Bednarik and Bronko Nagurski awards for National Defensive Player of the Year, the Lombardi Award as the best defensive lineman/linebacker, and the Pac-12 Defensive Player of the Year award.

As a middle linebacker who played off the edge in pass-rushing situations, he led the country with 29 tackles for loss, including 14 sacks. He also forced six fumbles for the Pac-12 South champs, including the highlight moment that put Wright on the national map — his late-game "Scooby strip" of Oregon's Marcus Mariota to preserve Arizona's upset in Eugene.

Where can he be better?

"My coverage, my movement skills," said Wright, able to play inside or outside linebacker. "Just kind of little things I'm trying to pick up, like the quarterback's eyes."

With an established reputation, a non-stop motor that evokes memories of Bruschi, the great nickname — given to him at a very young age when his dad looked at him and said, "Oh, my little Scooby-Doo" — he's not a bad bet to be back in a tuxedo on the awards circuit in December. But repeating is hard to do, and falling short of his 2014 stats likely would be held against him, even more so if the Wildcats don't duplicate their 10-win regular season.

Arizona coach Rich Rodriguez, though, doesn't worry about Wright's head swelling too big for his helmet.

"He went to all those banquets, had all those chicken dinners and when he got home, he just went back into the weight room on his own," Rodriguez said.

The chip on Wright's shoulder is evident in his Twitter handle: TwoStarScoob.

That refers to his recruiting ranking when he was wholly overlooked out of Cardinal Newman in Santa Rosa, Calif. Arizona, meanwhile, got one look at him on tape and raced to the phone to offer him a scholarship at the end of his junior year of high school.

"It was one of those deals where you watch and you're like, 'He's got size; he's a tough guy; he runs around ... let's offer him and hope no one else does. Can we keep it a secret?'" Rodriguez said.

Scooby has a super story, but let's dispel a couple of notions: He's not small (listed at 6-1, 246, but a bit bigger now) and he's not un-athletic. While relishing the "David vs. Goliath" storyline — a tattoo on his right arm depicts the scene of David's triumph — he's not a gutty little overachiever.

He's a big-timer whose dreams of being an All-American linebacker and an NFL player date to his earliest memories of running around in the backyard with his dad.

"He loves football and has a passion for it," Rodriguez said. "That's the greatest example I can talk about in showing his success."

— Anthony Gimino

TOP INSIDE LINEBACKERS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Scooby Wright**	Jr.	Arizona
	Favorite player as a kid was ex-Arizona star Tedy Bruschi. Perfect.		
2.	**Reggie Ragland**	Sr.	Alabama
	Can do it all as the leader of a Bama D that has chance to be great.		
3.	**Myles Jack**	Jr.	UCLA
	Moving inside from outside. He's great anywhere. Returning kicks, maybe?		
4.	**Dominique Alexander**	Jr.	Oklahoma
	Third-year starter earned second-team All-Big 12 honors last season.		
5.	**Antonio Morrison**	Sr.	Florida
	Only concern here is he missed spring because of knee injury in bowl.		
6.	**Kelby Brown**	Sr.	Duke
	Sixth-year senior coming back from ACL; was All-ACC in 2013.		
7.	**Raekwon McMillan**	So.	Ohio State
	He's the Next Big Thing on a team flush with next big things.		
8.	**Ryan Simmons**	Sr.	Oklahoma State
	Spirited leader has 26 career tackles for loss for the Cowboys.		
9.	**Joe Walker**	Sr.	Oregon
	He's the guy who went 100 yards after that goal-line gaffe by Utah.		
10.	**James Burgess**	Sr.	Louisville
	Combines with Keith Kelsey to give Cards an experienced, talented duo.		

TOP OUTSIDE LINEBACKERS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Jaylon Smith**	Jr.	Notre Dame
	An elite athlete who thrives wherever Irish put him; 112 stops last year.		
2.	**Eric Striker**	Sr.	Oklahoma
	Lot of football and big plays under his belt — 17 TFLs last season.		
3.	**Su'a Cravens**	Jr.	USC
	Move from S looks permanent; he'll improve on his 17 TFLs from 2014.		
4.	**Darron Lee**	So.	Ohio State
	Former HS QB is now playmaking centerpiece of super Buckeyes' D.		
5.	**Leonard Floyd**	Jr.	Georgia
	Quick first step makes him a dangerous pass rusher off the edge.		
6.	**Terrance Smith**	Sr.	Florida State
	Season highlight was a 94-yard INT return for touchdown vs. Florida.		
7.	**Pete Robertson**	Sr.	Texas Tech
	Hybrid OLB/DE productive on Tech's shaky D: 14.5 TFLs, 12 sacks.		
8.	**Jordan Jenkins**	Sr.	Georgia
	Not quite as talented as teammate Leonard Floyd, but more consistent.		
9.	**Kentrell Brothers**	Sr.	Missouri
	Aggressive player had 122 tackles last season and knack for the big play.		
10.	**Joshua Perry**	Sr.	Ohio State
	Made 124 tackles last season for champs; wants to improve pass-rush.		
11.	**Ed Davis**	Sr.	Michigan State
	Fifth-year senior is as "toolsy" as almost any LB; ready for huge season.		
12.	**Tyler Matakevich**	Sr.	Temple
	Trying to become seventh FBS player to have 100-plus stops for four years.		
13.	**Jalen Reeves-Maybin**	Jr.	Tennessee
	High football IQ helped him make 101 tackles, with 11 for loss, last year.		
14.	**Nick Kwiatkoski**	Sr.	West Virginia
	Led Mountaineers with 103 tackles, including 11.5 for loss.		
15.	**Peter Kalambayi**	Jr.	Stanford
	Speedy edge rusher ready to blossom as next Cardinal star defender.		

DEFENSIVE BACKS

Versatile Ramsey Embraces Return to Cornerback

JALEN RAMSEY

Photo by Joe Robbins

Jalen Ramsey arrived at Florida State expecting to start in his first game as a true freshman.

Ramsey didn't enroll early. And he knew full well that FSU had one of the best defensive backfields in the nation. Yet he did what he intended: He started the 2013 opener at cornerback.

Ramsey moved to safety a few games later, excelling in that responsibility.

Then he took on the versatile "star" role as a sophomore in 2014, forcing fumbles, knocking down passes and punishing receivers en route to an All-American season.

It may seem a little silly that Ramsey is on the move (again) as he prepares for his junior season. This time he's moving back to corner. Why take an AP second-team All-American out of the playmaking star position? Well, because he's Ramsey.

He's as competitive as anyone at FSU. Now that the 6-1, 201-pounder is at corner, well, he wants to be an elite corner.

"I know when I line up against whoever it is, the best receiver in the country or the worst receiver in the country, (they're) not going to be beat me," Ramsey said. "That's how I am."

With juniors P.J. Williams and Ronald Darby declaring early for the NFL Draft, FSU coach Jimbo Fisher and defensive coordinator Charles Kelly had options as they planned for the 2015 secondary. They feel Ramsey would do well — and would probably be an All-American — at corner, star or safety.

It just made the most sense to put him at corner.

"I think he can be a dominant, dominant boundary guy," Fisher said. "Big, long, athletic, can run, take that side away, be a great blitzer off the edge, still allow him to blitz and play some run support."

Putting Ramsey at boundary corner (Williams' old spot) makes life easy for FSU. The safeties don't have to worry all that much about any receiver that Ramsey is covering. And, often, he will be tasked with the opponent's No. 1 receiver.

"When we have man-to-man, we barely have to look his way because he's locking down," safety Nate Andrews said.

In spring, it clicked. Fisher was pleased, praising Ramsey after nearly every practice. Not only has Ramsey made a seamless transition to corner, he also has set the bar quite high, including for FSU's receivers at practice.

"I'll embarrass you straight up in front of everybody," Ramsey said.

Confidence, as you can tell, has never been an issue for Ramsey. Speaking up has never been a problem, either. He naturally does it. He leads with words, but also with actions.

While he's an All-American player, Ramsey has made sure the rest of the secondary is strong around him. He's helping develop Marquez White into FSU's other starting corner. And Ramsey's old job at "star" will go to his roommate, Trey Marshall. They often watch film together, and Ramsey has become a coach to Marshall.

"You've been there, pretty successful at that position, I want Trey to be even more successful at that position," Ramsey said. "I know he can really ball."

Ramsey can ball, too. He had 79 tackles, 12 pass breakups and two interceptions in 2014. Ramsey was a one-man wrecking crew at Miami in November, forcing a fumble, blocking an extra-point attempt and sealing the 30-26 win with an interception in the final minutes.

But now Ramsey is ready to get back to corner.

"I love corner," Ramsey said. "That's where I always wanted to be. Of course, we had great corners here before me. (Now) I can just focus on one thing. Do my job to the best of my ability."

— Bob Ferrante

TOP CORNERBACKS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Vernon Hargreaves III**	Jr.	Florida
	He's the purest of cover corners, but returning All-American is physical, too.		
2.	**Jalen Ramsey**	Jr.	Florida State
	Has the size, skills and trash-talking ability found in the best CBs.		
3.	**Kendall Fuller**	Jr.	Virginia Tech
	The last of the Fuller brothers at Tech, he broke up 17 passes last season.		
4.	**Zack Sanchez**	Jr.	Oklahoma
	Picked off six passes last season en route to first-team All-Big 12 honors.		
5.	**Ishmael Adams**	Jr.	UCLA
	Pros won't like his height (5-8), but Pac-12 foes fear his playmaking.		
6.	**Cameron Sutton**	Jr.	Tennessee
	Has All-SEC talent and growing rep as someone to not challenge.		
7.	**Kevin Peterson**	Sr.	Oklahoma State
	A fourth-year starter who locked down West Virginia's Kevin White in '14.		
8.	**Jonathan Jones**	Sr.	Auburn
	Led the SEC in pass breakups last year with 17 in a breakout season.		
9.	**KeiVarae Russell**	Sr.	Notre Dame
	Big-time talent coming back after missing 2014 because of suspension.		
10.	**Mackensie Alexander**	So.	Clemson
	Freshman All-American already has elite lock-down skills.		
11.	**Blake Countess**	Sr.	Michigan
	Down year in 2014, but everything is re-born in Ann Arbor, right?		
12.	**Fabian Moreau**	Sr.	UCLA
	Jim Mora once called him a potential All-American. Had flashes in '14.		

TOP SAFETIES

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Karl Joseph**	Sr.	West Virginia
	Has been one of the nation's top thumpers for the past three seasons.		
2.	**Jeremy Cash**	Sr.	Duke
	Just the facts: 111 tackles, 10.5 TFLs, 5.5 sacks, 2 INTs, 4 forced fumbles.		
3.	**Vonn Bell**	Jr.	Ohio State
	Former 5-star really showed what he could do late after knee felt better.		
4.	**Dante Barnett**	Sr.	Kansas State
	Second-team all-league; the backbone of a unit that is K-State's backbone.		
5.	**DeVon Edwards**	Sr.	Duke
	From unknown recruit, to elite KR, to play-making DB (133 stops, 5 FFs).		
6.	**Jordan Sterns**	Jr.	Oklahoma State
	Hard-hitting strong safety posted 103 tackles, best among Big 12 DBs.		
7.	**Quin Blanding**	So.	Virginia
	Cavs' bright spot: His 123 tackles led the nation's freshmen.		
8.	**Jamal Adams**	So.	LSU
	Aggressive style and a bit of a showman, but he gets results.		
9.	**Jabrill Peppers**	Fr.	Michigan
	With "A-plus" spring, touted redshirt is on the launching pad.		
10.	**Nate Gerry**	Jr.	Nebraska
	Intercepted five passes last season, all coming against Big Ten foes.		
11.	**Jordan Simone**	Sr.	Arizona State
	Walk-on from Washington state turned into top-notch playmaker.		
12.	**Michael Caputo**	Sr.	Wisconsin
	Second-team All-Big Ten (media), with 106 tackles, four for loss.		

ALL PURPOSE

Trojans' Jackson Eyes Heisman Pose, a la Woodson

ADOREE' JACKSON

Photo by Dave Sizer

USC sophomore Adoree' Jackson's goals sound overly ambitious for a football player, but that only tells half the story.

"I want to win the Heisman Trophy," Jackson said. "I want to win the Thorpe (Award) and the Heisman."

Winning the Thorpe as the nation's top defensive back sounds doable. The Heisman? That would be an extraordinary feat for a cornerback, but like the last defensive player to win it (Charles Woodson in 1997), Jackson also dabbles at wide receiver and is a returner.

"Actually, I don't think it will be hard for me (to win)," Jackson said. "I play offense, defense and special teams. Charles Woodson did it when he was at Michigan. That's how my mindset was set up when I came in to USC."

But Jackson's dreams don't stop there.

He also competes as a long jumper for the Trojans' track and field team.

"Being able to run track at the Olympics in Rio next year (is my goal)," Jackson said. "Just take a shot at that dream."

Say this: Jackson never limits himself. What's next? Quarterback?

Uh ... sure.

"You should ask (USC coach Steve Sarkisian)," Jackson said. "I wouldn't mind passing the ball or handing it off."

As you can tell, confidence is not a problem for young Mr. Jackson, who did not allow a touchdown pass until the final game of his true freshman season. He also caught three TD passes and returned two kickoffs for scores.

Jackson touched the ball 35 times in 2014 — and scored on five of them.

USC fans voted his 71-yard touchdown catch against Nebraska — when he caught a 1-yard pass and went 70 more for an electrifying score in USC's 45-42 Holiday Bowl win — as the Trojans' play of the year.

Perhaps the fans were also influenced by his 98-yard kickoff return in the same game.

"I believe the Holiday Bowl was a good glimpse," he said of his Heisman campaign.

The biggest issue for Sarkisian is figuring out how much to use him offensively; the 5-11, 185-pound Jackson is already the Trojans' best cornerback.

"We're going to have to be very strategic when we go into games of exactly how we're going to use him," Sarkisian said. "It will be different than it was a year ago because he has more volume. He has more offense that he can understand.

"We can do more with him on defense (as well). That doesn't mean he can go out and play 180 plays. We just have to be smart with him. ... There'll be games where we'll see him more on offense than maybe others. It's going to be (about) matchups. It's going to be game plans."

Part of being smart also includes managing his track career. Jackson was disappointed he wasn't allowed to skip USC's spring football and focus only on track, where he also ran on the 4x400-meter relay team. Sarkisian refused his request, but Jackson said he will try again next spring to do track only.

"That's one of the things we have to talk about. It just depends on how this season goes, actually," said Jackson, a Belleville, Ill., native who was a *Parade* All-American at Serra High School in Gardena, Calif.

Despite the track stuff and the attention Jackson gained from his offensive and special teams' touches, he knows his future revolves around being an NFL defender. He had 49 tackles, including four for losses, and 10 deflections last season, earning Freshman All-American honors from various publications.

"God-willing, if I get drafted; I want to play corner," he said. "That probably would be the best position for me. That's just how I feel, how I see it."

— Scott Wolf

TOP KICKERS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Roberto Aguayo**	Jr.	Florida State
	Has hit 48 of 52 field-goal attempts with range well past 50 yards.		
2.	**Brad Craddock**	Sr.	Maryland
	Big-legged Australian, a former punter, is reigning Groza Award winner.		
3.	**Josh Lambert**	Jr.	West Virginia
	Made 16 FGs of 40-plus yards last season, an NCAA record.		
4.	**Jaden Oberkrom**	Sr.	TCU
	Was 22 of 27 last season, and his last-play 37-yarder beat West Virginia.		
5.	**Andy Phillips**	Jr.	Utah
	'Automatic' Andy (40 of 48 career) is also 3 for 3 on onside kicks.		
6.	**Jake Elliott**	Jr.	Memphis
	Need a long FG? He has made six of 50-plus in his first two seasons.		
7.	**Rafael Gaglianone**	So.	Wisconsin
	Big kid from Brazil has NFL leg, hit 19 of 22 en route to cult hero status.		
8.	**Ross Martin**	Sr.	Duke
	Enters season having made 52 of 63 career FGs, with a long of 53.		

TOP PUNTERS

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**JK Scott**	So.	Alabama
	Led nation in punting (48.0); Tide led in net punting, too.		
2.	**Tom Hackett**	Sr.	Utah
	Ray Guy winner led nation in punts inside the 10 (19 of them).		
3.	**Austin Rehkow**	Jr.	Idaho
	Consistent excellence: 47.8-yard average in freshman and sophomore years.		
4.	**Drew Kaser**	Sr.	Texas A&M
	Was an AP second-team All-American as a sophomore in 2013.		
5.	**Drew Riggleman**	Sr.	Arizona
	Improved consistency pushed him to fourth nationally (46.1-yard average).		
6.	**Peter Mortell**	Sr.	Minnesota
	Led Big Ten (45.1), then joked about launching Heisman campaign.		
7.	**Cameron Johnston**	Jr.	Ohio State
	Even the Buckeyes have to punt, and Aussie has 44.5-yard career average.		
8.	**Alex Kinal**	Sr.	Wake Forest
	No touchbacks in 81 punts helped Deacons rank fourth in net punting.		

TOP ALL PURPOSE

RK	NAME	CLASS	COLLEGE
1.	**Adoree' Jackson**	So.	USC
	Could have made our CB list, too, but skills fit better here at No. 1.		
2.	**Ryan Switzer**	Jr.	North Carolina
	Led team in receiving last season; had five punt return TDs in 2013.		
3.	**Isaiah McKenzie**	So.	Georgia
	"The Human Joystick" had three return TDs, blooming at WR in spring.		
4.	**Speedy Noil**	So.	Texas A&M
	WR/PR/KR led Aggies in all-purpose yards; off-field issues in the spring.		
5.	**Jakeem Grant**	Sr.	Texas Tech
	Only Big 12 player to have more than 900 receiving yards, 500 KR yards.		
6.	**Christian McCaffrey**	So.	Stanford
	No longer has small package of plays; Stanford says Ed's kid will do it all.		
7.	**Kalen Ballage**	So.	Arizona State
	Physical running back, kick returner, situational pass-rusher.		
8.	**Alex Ross**	Jr.	Oklahoma
	Ran for 595 yards and returned two kickoffs for touchdowns.		

UNIT RANKINGS

TOP 10 BACKFIELD

This is how we do it: A team has to be stacked at quarterback AND running back to even get on the watch list to make the cut. Why do we do it this way? We think it's a lot more interesting than just ranking the best units at quarterback and running back, which often would simply mirror our player rankings.

1. OHIO STATE

Expect anything different? Cardale Jones, J.T. Barrett, Braxton Miller ... in no college football offseason has a single program's quarterback "problem" ever looked so promising. And let's face it — a stiff-of-stiffs could hand off to Ezekiel Elliott with great success. No need to linger here. The Buckeyes have the nation's best backfield, and everyone knows it.

2. TCU

With just about everyone back on offense for the Horned Frogs, there won't be any reason why Trevone Boykin, in his second year in the spread offense and presumably even more comfortable, can't lead the offense past the stunning 46.5 points per game it averaged last season. TCU considers at least three of its running backs as being starter-worthy — Aaron Green, Kyle Hicks, Trevorris Johnson — and fresh legs are good in this fast-paced college football world.

3. USC

Cody Kessler is going to go deep more often and play faster as the Trojans settle in to the second year of coach Steve Sarkisian. Kessler passed for 3,826 yards and 39 touchdowns last season and has young, talented receivers to throw to (JuJu Smith, emerging Steven Mitchell) and ample backfield options, even with Buck Allen turning pro. Justin Davis and Tre Madden will do the work there.

4. OREGON

Yes, as you can tell by our No. 4 national ranking of the Ducks, we're pushing all in on Eastern Washington transfer quarterback Vernon Adams. Royce Freeman, Thomas Tyner and buzz-worthy redshirt freshman Tony Brooks-James form a loaded backfield. Byron Marshall, converted to receiver, probably still knows his running backs reads in case he's needed in a pinch.

5. OKLAHOMA

The Sooners aren't saying who is going to play quarterback, but Trevor Knight or Texas Tech transfer Baker Mayfield are a better pair than most teams have, so that's not a bad place to start. (The smart money is on Mayfield, by the way). What's even more enviable is the running back depth — Samaje Perine, Joe Mixon and Alex Ross. Mixon was supposed to be the star newcomer in 2014 before a season-long suspension, ceding the stage to the bull-strong Perine.

6. NOTRE DAME

The Irish will enter training camp with a dynamic, deserving starter at quarterback in Everett Golson or Malik Zaire. If C.J. Prosise pulls off a conversion from receiver to running back — and spring indications were tantalizingly positive — he could blow up into a star. Either way, he'll be a lightning bolt somewhere in the offense, and Tarean Folston and Greg Bryant are still around to handle the handoffs. Options. It's nice to have options.

7. TENNESSEE

QB Josh Dobbs will be a full-blown star this season. Jalen Hurd did his part last season in an amazing wave of freshman running backs across the country, rushing for 899 yards. He has company this season. Running back Alvin Kamara, an Alabama transfer by way of junior college, is pegged by us as the top newcomer in the SEC.

CARDALE JONES

Photo by RD Moore

8. CAL

Coach Sonny Dykes calls Jared Goff "an elite-level quarterback" and we do not disagree. Goff has passed for 7,481 yards in his two seasons, and when scouts write up their reports, they will wear out the term "arm talent." Meanwhile, Daniel Lasco hit 1,115 rushing yards last season — more than 500 of which came in the last four games.

9. ARKANSAS

The Razorbacks have 1,000-yard backs in Jonathan Williams and Alex Collins, complemented by an experienced quarterback, Brandon Allen, who is appropriately careful with the ball. He was intercepted just five times last season, so bonus points for knowing his role.

10. PENN STATE

It's Akeel Lynch's time to shine at running back. NFL-armed Christian Hackenberg will be glad to have the help.

TOP 10 RECEIVERS

1. BAYLOR

Corey Coleman emerged as the Bears' go-to guy last season, making 64 catches for 1,119 yards, but speedy KD Cannon was right on his heels as a true freshman, with 58 catches for 1,030 yards and eight scores. That they might be the best pair of receivers in the country is worth noting, but what separates the Bears is how far down they go on the depth chart without a major drop-off: Jay Lee, Lynx Hawthorne, Davion Hall, Quan Jones, Chris Platt, Ishmael Zamora ...

2. NOTRE DAME

Will Fuller and Corey Robinson lead a group with great size, strong work ethic and underrated toughness. Stretching defenses won't be a problem, nor will snaring balls in traffic and blocking on the outside. Good stuff.

3. CLEMSON

Mike Williams is an All-ACC talent, and sophomore Artavis Scott is a field-stretcher along the lines of a Sammy Watkins. If that sounds like hyperbole, check back with us at this time next season. Behind them, incoming freshmen Deon Cain and Ray-Ray McCloud are expected to make an impact for superstar QB Deshaun Watson.

4. OHIO STATE

Michael Thomas is a traditional leading guy. He is well-rounded. Can do it all. No issues there. Some-

body does have to replace Devin Smith's deep threat (Cory Smith?), but options and versatility abound with this group. Extreme athletes Jalin Marshall and Dontre Wilson can line up at H-back or outside, catch the ball in space and make magic happen.

5. TEXAS A&M

The Aggies can go Speedy (Noil) and they can go big (6-5 Ricky Seals-Jones). They can go proven (All-SEC junior Josh Reynolds) and they can trot out yet another amazing recruit (early-enrolled Christian Kirk). Best quality, depth in the SEC.

6. CAL

Kenny Lawler is part acrobat, leading the Bears last season with 54 catches for 701 yards and nine touchdowns. If those numbers sound a bit modest by modern standards, it's because Jared Goff has eyes for all of his targets. Pretty much all of them are back — Bryce Treggs, Stephen Anderson, Maurice Harris, Trevor Davis, Darius Powe. That's 167 catches right there.

7. ARIZONA

Cayleb Jones is one of those elite go-up-and-snag-the-ball-at-its-highest-point kind of guys. He'll lead the way in a mix-and-match group that has waterbugs and speedsters ... and The Kid's kid (junior Trey Griffey) is getting better all the time, too.

8. TENNESSEE

Perhaps lacking in star power, but this position group will end up being a team strength that works well with QB Josh Dobbs, who has tall red-zone targets in Marquez North and Jason Croom. Von Pearson and Pig Howard are returning starters, and sophomore tight end Ethan Wolf is on his way to stardom.

9. OLE MISS

Wide receiver Laquon Treadwell. Tight end Evan Engram. Can't go wrong with a couple of All-Americans.

10. OKLAHOMA STATE

Nine of the top 10 pass-catchers from last season return, and now they get to work for a whole season with QB Mason Rudolph.

TOP 10

OFFENSIVE LINE

1. OHIO STATE

Guard Pat Elflein and tackle Taylor Decker are the stars. Billy Price is coming on like gangbusters, with a huge spring that had everyone talking about his play as much as his raw strength. Jacoby Boren

Corey Coleman

Photo by Manny Flores Cal Sport Media via AP Images

likewise is a returning starter. Read it and weep, all non-Ohio State fans. This is basically the same group that led the way for 878 rushing yards in the stunning three-game postseason run. One starts to wonder how the Buckeyes' offense can possibly go wrong. Don't bother thinking about it too hard.

2. BAYLOR

Left tackle Spencer Drango, who grew up north of Austin, Texas, would have loved to be a Longhorn, but the Texas staff only made a futile push after he had committed to Baylor. That says plenty about how the fortunes of the programs have changed in recent years. Drango, a fourth-year starter at left tackle, is an All-American, leading a line that returns intact from the nation's most prolific offense. Also back: tackle Pat Colbert, guards Blake Muir and Jarell Broxton, and center Kyle Fuller.

3. MICHIGAN STATE

As long as the Jacks are around — center Allen and tackle Conklin — the Spartans will have an intimidating offense to match their always-brutish defense. Allen earned first-team All-Big Ten honors from the league coaches last season; Conklin was a second-team choice.

4. NOTRE DAME

Left tackle Ronnie Stanley and center Nick Martin are up there with any pair, anywhere. Overall, this is the deepest group of linemen that Brian Kelly has had at Notre Dame since arriving for the 2010 season. The Irish will maul many a defense in 2015.

5. ARKANSAS

The Hogs are kind of turning into the Stanford of the South. Is that a thing? Arkansas will go heavy and pound opponents, going counter-culture to the modern spread offense. The scheme fits the personnel, and the personnel fits the scheme. A line with four returning starters — Dan Skipper, Sebastian Tretola, Mitch Smothers and Denver Kirkland — is able to clear space when everyone in the stadium knows the run is coming.

6. TCU

Four starters return from a line that went from mystery to mainstay across the brilliant course of last season for the Horned Frogs. Two players — center Joey Hunt and tackle Halapoulivaati Vaitai — earned second-team All-Big 12 honors. Vaitai has moved to the left side this season to fill the one vacancy, and sophomore Joseph Noteboom is stepping up on the right side. Overall, TCU returns linemen who have a combined 98 career starts.

7. GEORGIA

The Bulldogs never lacked for a running back last season, Nick Chubb replacing Todd Gurley, and Georgia led the SEC with 257.8 rushing yards per game. It's time to give all due respect to guys like tackle John Theus and guard Greg Pyke.

8. ALABAMA

You can't quibble with sophomore left tackle Cam Robinson and senior center Ryan Kelly, among the best nationally at their positions. They are the only returning starters in the group, although the line came together nicely in the spring. Nick Saban even offered public atta-boys to senior right tackle Dominick Jackson, a former junior college transfer known for blocking out the sun in the run game. Redshirt freshman left guard Ross Pierschbacher, from Cedar Falls, Iowa, is going to be a good one.

9. LSU

This is just what you would expect. The Tigers have plenty of guys who look good right off the bus. Tackles Jerald Hawkins and Vadal Alexander, and center Ethan Pocic, are candidates for postseason conference honors. Hawkins flipped from right tackle to left tackle this spring, with Alexander taking Hawkins' old spot after playing guard.

10. UCLA

Don't be fooled by last season's average of 3.15 sacks allowed per game — those were often as much on QB Brett Hundley's indecision as anything ... although, we admit to being fooled by the Bruins' line before, thinking it was all grown up before it really was. Well, again, it looks all grown up. Senior center Jake Brendel and junior guard Alex Redmond are two standouts; 2013 starter Simon Goines returns from a redshirt year; and junior college transfer Zach Batemen figures to be in the mix somewhere, too. What could go wrong?

UNIT RANKINGS

TOP 10 DEFENSIVE LINE

1. OHIO STATE

We'll take Joey Bosa and Adolphus Washington and meet you in any dark alley, OK? Bosa, you know. The standing back-flips. The long, flowing hair (oops, sorry, that was gone this spring). The post-sack shrug. He had 21 tackles for loss and 13.5 sacks last season. Washington had 10.5 and 4.5, mostly playing at nose guard, but he'll move over to defensive tackle, more of a playmaking spot, to replace departed Michael Bennett. Maybe the other two spots on the line end up by-committee, but you don't see Urban Meyer sweating it. Seriously, the skill level is just scary. It's a bad year to be an opposing quarterback in the Big Ten.

2. ALABAMA

The Crimson Tide's line doesn't have to concede much at all to Ohio State's in terms of quality and depth, but it also can't do much crowing, considering the 281 rushing yards allowed to the Buckeyes in a national semifinal last season. Nothing to do about that now except turn it into motivation and hope for a rematch. Alabama's best chance of getting back to those playoffs is through an hellacious defensive front seven, and the best part of that hellacious front seven is a line led by Jonathan Allen, Jarran Reed and A'Shawn Robinson. Quality reserves abound: Dalvin Tomlinson, D.J. Pettway, Da'Shawn Hand, Darren Lake ... and whatever other five-stars Saban keeps in his back pocket. We should mention that Alabama allowed only five rushing touchdowns last season.

3. BAYLOR

The Bears return their entire starting front four, including Shawn Oakman, who inspired wickedly funny internet memes last winter due to his imposing physical stature capable, as one suggested, of intimidating Liam Neeson into giving up the search for his kidnapped daughter (look it up, folks). It's also best to probably not mess with All-Big 12 tackle Andrew Billings, tackle Beau Blackshear, or ends Jamal Palmer and K.J. Smith. Oakman and his sidekicks allowed just 117.7 rushing yards per game.

4. MICHIGAN STATE

Everyone knows about end Shilique "The Freak" Calhoun, who — let's be honest — needs to be even better to live up to that nickname. Standards are such that 12.5 tackles for loss, including eight sacks, was something of a "meh" season for Calhoun. Nice to have standards. Versatile linemate Lawrence Thomas is equally freaky.

5. OLE MISS

Robert Nkemdiche is used to the spotlight, first as the No. 1 recruit in the nation in the 2013 class, then as part of last season's No. 1 scoring defense and certainly as a guy who always has demanded special attention from offensive linemen. Whatever he lacks in eye-popping stats, he makes up for by allowing teammates — like end Marquis Haynes and nose tackle Issac Gross — to have more freedom to roam.

6. VIRGINIA TECH

A Hokies' resurgence is closely tied to how dang good this group can be. Defensive tackle Luther Maddy returns from injury. Standouts Dadi Nicolas and Ken Ekanem return after landing on the ACC's all-conference teams last season. An opener against defending national champ Ohio State (and our No. 1-rated offensive line) awaits.

7. PENN STATE

Undersized tackle Anthony Zettel has a motor that never shuts off. His 17 tackles for loss last season had a way of making those around him work harder, and when it was all over, Penn State had the No. 3 rushing defense in the country. The Lions looked deep and dominant again this spring.

8. TCU

The Frogs allowed an average of 2.78 yards per rush last season, the best mark in the country. Big man Chucky Hunter is gone, but the rest of the crew is back — Mike Tuaua, Josh Carraway, James McFarland, Davion Pierson, etc. — and Nebraska transfer Aaron Curry joins a deep rotation at tackle. Good times.

VERNON HARGREAVES III

Photo by Mark LoMoglio Icon Sportswire via AP Images

9. AUBURN

The big thing here is the addition of coordinator Will Muschamp. Well, that, and the return from injury of end Carl Lawson. Muschamp will get these guys playing hard, attacking, and the Tigers won't be the pushovers they were last season. Veteran defensive tackle Montravius Adams, among others, and a wave of youth (Dontavius Russell, among others) helps fuel the turnaround.

10. NOTRE DAME

Sheldon Day and Jarron Jones could be the most imposing duo of senior tackles in the country. The spring emergence of early-enrolled 300-pounder Jerry Tillery eased depth concerns inside. We'll peg returning starting defensive end Isaac Rochell for a breakout season.

TOP 10 LINEBACKERS

1. OHIO STATE

Add new inside starter Raekwon McMillan to senior Joshua Perry and the hugely promising Darron Lee on the outside, and — is this over the top? — these guys should just be moved to the NFL as a unit right now. Lee loves to tease McMillan by calling him "Chosen One" — a notion that was not dispelled last season when the five-star recruit saw considerable playing time. McMillan is more athletic than the guy he's replacing in the lineup — Curtis Grant — so here's just another area in which Ohio State looks better than last season. On a team with no weaknesses, linebacker is a particular strength.

2. GEORGIA

The Dawgs' four-man group features one of the best pair of outside linebackers in the country in junior Leonard Floyd and senior Jordan Jenkins, both high-motor pass rushers. That's nice. But what to do with sophomore outside linebacker Lorenzo Carter? Such tough decisions for second-year coordinator Jeremy Pruitt, who could slide one of the trio inside or move someone closer to the action with their hand in the dirt.

3. ALABAMA

Reggie Ragland takes over as the leader of the unit, a senior who has earned Nick Saban's trust. He packs a wallop on defense, but not like Reuben Foster, a junior and former No. 1 high school inside linebacker prospect who is trying to translate his fury on special teams to the discipline of Saban's D. A deep, talented corps is further explanation for why this defense could be Bama's best since 2011.

DEFENSE

4. NOTRE DAME

Jaylon Smith is a major talent. Joe Schmidt and Jarrett Grace — impressively, back from a terrible knee injury — are experienced and tough. Nyles Morgan is an exciting up-and-comer. The run D will be stout.

5. OKLAHOMA

Eric Striker is a great pass rusher, with 15.5 sacks and 27.5 tackles for loss in the past two years. Junior Dominique Alexander is a two-year starter who earned second-team all-conference honors last season. Inside 'backer Jordan Evans is another returning starter who made 93 tackles last season.

6. UCLA

Myles Jack can be whatever he wants. He's dabbled, spectacularly, at running back. His coverage skills are such that he can play safety or, ahem, cornerback. Coach Jim Mora wants him at inside linebacker in the Bruins' base this season, making him an unavoidable hub in the middle. Whatever. Just line him up and enjoy the athletic freak show. Elsewhere, Butkus Award winner Eric Kendricks is gone, but sophomore Kenny Young is promising and pass-rushing outside linebacker Deon Hollins made nine sacks last season.

7. USC

This is where Su'a Cravens lives now. It's hard to peg the talented junior, a former safety, into just one position, other than to say he's just a *football player.* Middle linebacker Lamar Dawson was impressive in spring on his way back from knee problems. Anthony Sarao will be a third-year starter, if he holds off talented young dudes.

8. OREGON

The Ducks have all kind of versatile, athletic linebackers, including a quartet of seniors — Joe Walker, Rodney Hardrick, Tyson Coleman and Christian French. Oregon likes to rotate, and it has the depth to do it. (We do have to note the Pac-12's overall strength at linebacker, as Arizona State and Stanford just missed our cut, and Arizona has Scooby Wright.)

9. LOUISVILLE

Given that Florida State is dealing with uncertainty at linebacker (Reggie Northrup's torn ACL in the Rose Bowl), we're going to give Louisville the nod as the ACC's best at the position. James Burgess and Keith Kelsey are the veteran core of a defense that will hang its hat on being physical up front. Coach Bobby Petrino says the defense, revamped though it is, can be dominant.

10. UTAH STATE

A deserved nod to a team from outside the Power 5 conferences, as the Aggies bring back Nick Vigil, who was All-Mountain West as a sophomore last season, and Kyler Fackrell, a legit NFL prospect who suffered an ACL injury in the 2014 season-opener.

Photo by AP Photo/Ric Tapia

TOP 10 DEFENSIVE BACKS

1. FLORIDA

The Gators can play D. That hasn't been the hang-up. All-American junior cornerback Vernon Hargreaves III heads up a five-man unit for Florida, which had more interceptions last season (16) than touchdowns allowed (15). Not challenging Hargreaves is wise, but that's a pick-your-poison kind of a deal for the opposition as the Gators roll out a deep unit of Brian Poole, Keanu Neal, Jalen Tabor, Quincy Wilson, Marcus Maye ... you get the idea.

2. FLORIDA STATE

We acknowledge that the talent drain from Florida State hit here, too — Ronald Darby and P.J. Williams are gone — but the big deal is that Jalen Ramsey is not. Moving from the "star" position to boundary corner, his size is going to be a full-on nightmare for receivers. Starters Nate Andrews and Tyler Hunter return at the safety positions. Be on the lookout for early-enrolled five-star frosh Derwin James.

3. OHIO STATE

Another area where the Buckeyes are as healthy as they'll ever be, with three starters back from the 2014 title team. Junior Vonn Bell is a dominant safety, and Eli Apple becomes the man at cornerback as a sophomore.

4. MICHIGAN

Is this the season Jabrill Peppers lives up to the massive billing? With him lurking, and terrific corners Blake Countess and Jourdan Lewis holding things down in their areas, the Wolverines could vault to the top of this list by season's end.

5. NOTRE DAME

The Irish defense is strong up the middle and dynamite on the outside in the back end with cornerbacks Kei-Varae Russell and Cole Luke. They'll make their team's pass rush look good.

6. DUKE

Because when you think of Duke, you think, "Athletic defensive backs!" Hey, the Blue Devils actually have them, starting with senior safety Jeremy Cash (he did start his career at Ohio State, in case you didn't know) and DeVon Edwards, a top playmaker. Cash has made 115 tackles in each of the past two seasons, and his decision to let the NFL wait was huge for the Blue Devils. All five starters in the secondary return.

7. USC

Adoree' Jackson has a chance to be the "it" player in college football. Senior Kevon Seymour, the starting cornerback on the other side, has the attention of NFL scouts. The safety positions will work themselves out just fine, trust us.

8. UCLA

A set of cornerbacks doesn't come more athletic than Ishmael Adams and Fabian Moreau, although we'd like to see more consistency. Another corner, Marcus Rios, allows for different combinations. Safety Randall Goforth, returning from shoulder surgeries — yes, one on each — is another big plus after he missed most of last season.

9. LSU

The Tigers have a national claim on being DBU (yes, we see you Alabama and Virginia Tech; calm down, Texas) and it's more of the same this season with safeties Jamal Adams and Jalen Mills, and cornerback Tre'Davious White.

10. OKLAHOMA STATE

The Cowboys have their top three cornerbacks returning and will be even deeper if, as expected, Michael Hunter, a two-year starter at Indiana, joins the team as a graduate transfer. Safety Jordan Sterns had 103 tackles last season.

PICKING THE AAC

Trio of New Coaches, New Program, Highlight Year 3 of AAC

As the American Athletic Conference begins its third season, a pattern is being established. Programs interested in keeping pace with the high-scoring offenses at Cincinnati, Memphis and East Carolina are tabbing offensive coordinators from Power 5 conferences to lead them.

Tulsa and SMU, two struggling teams, made such a move, as did not-so-downtrodden Houston.

Tulsa hired former Baylor offensive coordinator Philip Montgomery, whose Bears averaged a nation-leading 48.2 points and 581.5 yards per game. SMU summoned Chad Morris to his native Dallas two years after his Clemson offense set school records by averaging 41 points and 513 yards.

Houston got Ohio State offensive coordinator Tom Herman, whose arrival was delayed by the Buckeyes' run to the College Football Playoff title. He was the 2014 Frank Broyles Award winner as the nation's top assistant.

Their hires came three years after Memphis lured TCU co-offensive coordinator Justin Fuente to resuscitate a Tiger program on life support. Fuente got results in his third season as Memphis won 10 games for the first time since 1938, grabbed a share of a conference title for the first time since 1971 and went to a bowl game for the first time since 2008.

Memphis will be the favorite to win the American's West Division as 6-7 quarterback Paxton Lynch returns after leading the Tigers to a highly successful season that concluded with a Miami Beach Bowl victory over BYU. Lynch, a junior, added weight in the offseason and should be a stronger-armed version of the player who passed for 3,031 yards and 22 touchdowns.

Houston could challenge Memphis. The Cougars went 8-5 behind dual-threat quarterback Greg Ward Jr., who began the season as a receiver but quickly developed into a playmaker. He'll benefit from Herman's influence, as well as input from new offensive coordinator Major Applewhite. Houston also returns the league's most experienced backfield duo of Kenneth Farrow and Ryan Jackson. Farrow ended the season with four straight 100-yard rushing games.

Newcomer Navy became the American's 12th football-playing school and allowed the league to split into divisions and stage a championship game. The Midshipmen will be competitive. Coach Ken Niumatalolo has led Navy to six bowls in seven years and his team returns star quarterback Keenan Reynolds.

Cincinnati, with prolific QB Gunner Kiel, will be a strong candidate to win the East Division. The Bearcats won seven straight to end the regular season. Central Florida and Temple are expected to give the Bearcats their strongest challenges in the division race.

— Phil Stukenborg

CONFERENCE PICKS

EAST DIVISION	Good news	Bad news	Our call
1. Cincinnati	QB Gunner Kiel returns for second season after throwing for 3,254 yards and 31 TDs.	Defense ranked ninth in league allowing 439 yards per game.	With Kiel and $86-million renovated Nippert Stadium, Cincinnati is rolling to division title.
2. UCF	RB William Stanback and QB Justin Holman will be solid leaders on offense.	WR Breshad Perriman, All-American CB Jacoby Glenn left early to the NFL.	George O'Leary has been able to reload before. He'll do so again.
3. Temple	Owls were No. 1 in AAC scoring defense; allowed league-low nine TD passes.	QB P.J. Walker threw more interceptions (15) than TD passes (13) last season.	If Walker regains his freshman-year efficiency, Owls easily will go bowling.
4. USF	Sophomore Marlon Mack (1,041 yards, 9 TDs) is the best RB in the league.	A rebuilding team has non-league games vs. Florida State, Maryland, Syracuse.	Love the addition of coaching veteran Dick Tomey as associate AD with oversight of program.
5. East Carolina	Whoever wins QB battle will work behind four returnees on the offensive line.	Pirates lost QB Shane Carden and WR Justin Hardy (the NCAA's career receptions leader).	Tough schedule will make it hard for Pirates to make ninth bowl in 10 years.
6. Connecticut	Bob Diaco might have found a QB in NC State transfer Bryant Shirreffs.	Veteran TE Sean McQuillan was charged with assault after spring practice ended.	An offense that struggled last season will probably struggle again.
WEST DIVISION			
1. Memphis	QB Paxton Lynch returns for third season after leading team to 10 wins and bowl victory.	Highly regarded D-coordinator Barry Odom left for same job at Missouri, his alma mater.	With multiple offensive weapons, Memphis is the team to beat in the West.
2. Houston	Dual-threat QB Greg Ward Jr. is only going to get better.	The Cougars lost depth at QB when John O'Korn transferred to Michigan..	New coach Tom Herman is going to work out just fine in Houston.
3. Navy	QB Keenan Reynolds holds NCAA record for rushing TDs by a QB (64).	The Midshipmen lost six key starters from their defense.	Navy is great addition to league, will make seventh bowl in eight years under Ken Niumatalolo.
4. Tulane	Key defensive players are back, including DB Parry Nickerson (six INTs) and LB Nico Marley.	Green Wave can't close. Tulane dropped four of last five in 2013, five of last six in '14.	Tulane has a young, talented offense and should improve on last year's 3-9 mark..
5. SMU	Chad Morris takes over and installs his traditionally potent offense.	SMU finished last in AAC in scoring, offense, rushing and most defensive categories.	Morris, with his strong Texas connections, will turn the program around — just not this year.
6. Tulsa	Golden Hurricane turns to ex-Baylor OC Philip Montgomery. Yeah, this will be fun.	Montgomery must address a porous defense that allowed a league-high 59 TDs.	Montgomery will need time to get Hurricane up to Baylor-level offense.

Lindy's 2015 ALL-AAC TEAM

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Gunner Kiel	Jr.	Cincinnati
RB	William Stanback	Jr.	UCF
RB	Marlon Mack	So.	USF
WR	Keevan Lucas	Jr.	Tulsa
WR	Mekale McKay	Sr.	Cincinnati
TE	Alan Cross	Sr.	Memphis
C	Kyle Friend	Sr.	Temple
OL	Parker Ehinger	Sr.	Cincinnati
OL	E.K. Binns	Sr.	Navy
OL	Ike Harris	Sr.	East Carolina
OL	Garrett Stafford	Jr.	Tulsa
AP	Demarcus Ayers	Jr.	Houston
K	Jake Elliott	Jr.	Memphis

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	Thomas Niles	Sr.	UCF
DL	Matt Ioannidis	Sr.	Temple
DL	Derrick Alexander	Sr.	Tulsa
DL	Praise Martin-Oguike	Sr.	Temple
LB	Tyler Matakevic	Sr.	Temple
LB	Nico Marley	Jr.	Tulane
LB	Zeek Bigger	Sr.	East Carolina
DB	William Jackson	Sr.	Houston
DB	Adrian McDonald	Sr.	Houston
DB	Quincy Adams	Sr.	Navy
DB	Parry Nickerson	So.	Tulane
P	Mattias Ciabatti	Sr.	USF

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Paxton Lynch	Jr.	Memphis
RB	Kenneth Farrow	Sr.	Houston
RB	Doroland Dorceus	Jr.	Memphis
WR	Isaiah Jones	Sr.	East Carolina
WR	Keyarris Garrett	Sr.	Tulsa
TE	Sean Price	Sr.	USF
C	Jason Rae	Jr.	UCF
OL	Brynjar Gudmundsson	Sr.	USF
OL	Alex Cooper	Sr.	Houston
OL	Chavis Dickey	So.	UCF
OL	Taylor Lasecki	Sr.	SMU
AP	Deion Sanders Jr.	Jr.	SMU
K	Andrew Gantz	So.	Cincinnati

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Royce LaFrance	Sr.	Tulane
DL	Bernard Sarra	Sr.	Navy
DL	Demetris Anderson	Sr.	UCF
DL	Ernest Suttles	So.	Memphis
LB	Nigel Harris	So.	USF
LB	Montese Overton	Sr.	East Carolina
LB	Jackson Dillon	Jr.	Memphis
DB	Tavon Young	Sr.	Temple
DB	Michael Mudoh	Sr.	Tulsa
DB	Trevon Stewart	Sr.	Houston
DB	Andrew Adams	Sr.	UConn
P	Spencer Smith	So.	Memphis

THE BIG ONES

Sept. 5	Penn State at Temple
Sept.12	Temple at Cincinnati
Sept.12	Houston at Louisville
Sept. 19	East Carolina at Navy
Sept. 24	Cincinnati at Memphis
Sept. 26	UCF at South Carolina
Oct. 1	Miami at Cincinnati
Oct. 3	Air Force at Navy
Oct. 10	Navy at Notre Dame
Oct. 17	Cincinnati at BYU
Oct. 17	Ole Miss at Memphis
Oct. 31	UCF at Cincinnati
Nov. 7	Cincinnati at Houston
Nov. 27	Navy at Houston
Dec. 12	Navy vs. Army

BOWL CONNECTIONS

AAC champ can participate in College Football Playoff and is eligible for the one spot available in the six major bowls that is given to a team from the so-called Group of Five conferences (Sun Belt, MAC, Mountain West, American, Conference USA). The selection committee will decide.

Birmingham Bowl vs. SEC
St. Petersburg Bowl vs. C-USA
Miami Beach Bowl vs. C-USA
Military Bowl vs. ACC
Hawaii Bowl vs. Mountain West
Boca Raton Bowl vs. MAC
Cure Bowl vs. Sun Belt
Austin Bowl vs. Sun Belt

TOP 10 NFL TALENT

1. Gunner Kiel	QB	Jr.	Cincinnati	Ex-Notre Dame QB has first-round potential.
2. Tyler Matakevich	LB	Sr.	Temple	100-plus tackles in each of first three seasons.
3. William Jackson	DB	Sr.	Houston	NFL third-round grade convinced him to return.
4. Michael Mudoh	DB	Sr.	Tulsa	His 271 tackles rank fourth among active players.
5. Thomas Niles	DE	Sr.	UCF	Had sacks in six straight games.
6. Garrett Stafford	OL	Sr.	Tulsa	Has 26 straight starts at left tackle.
7. William Stanback	RB	Jr.	UCF	First-team All-AAC despite missing three games.
8. Ike Harris	OL	Sr.	ECU	Has battled injuries to become fixture at LT.
9. Parker Ehinger	OL	Sr.	Cincinnati	A first-team AAC selection in 2014.
10. Marlon Mack	RB	So.	USF	Was 1,000-yard back as a freshman.

Most Valuable Player	Offensive Player of the Year	Defensive Player of the Year	Newcomer of the Year
Marlon Mack RB, South Florida	Paxton Lynch QB, Memphis	Tyler Matakevic LB, Temple	Keenan Reynolds QB, Navy

HONOR ROLL

Most accurate passer	Greg Ward, Jr.	Houston
Strongest arm	Gunner Kiel	Cincinnati
Best scrambler	Keenan Reynolds	Navy
Coolest in the clutch	Paxton Lynch	Memphis
Toughest to bring down	William Stanback	UCF
Best hands	Keevan Lucas	Tulsa
Most dangerous deep threat	Mekale McKay	Cincinnati
Best pass blocker	Parker Ehinger	Cincinnati
Best run blocker	E.K. Binns	Navy
Best cover corner	William Jackson	Houston
Best pass rusher	Derrick Alexander	Tulsa
Special teams demon	Demarcus Ayers	Houston

MEMPHIS | TIGERS

AAC rank: 1 Record: 10-3 AAC record: 7-1 (T-1st) Stadium: Liberty Bowl Memorial (61,008)

RANKING 40

TIGERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Memphis, Tenn.
COACH: Justin Fuente — At Memphis and overall: 17-20, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Darrell Dickey
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Galen Scott

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014, tri-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 7 offense, 3 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Paxton Lynch, RB Doroland Dorceus, WR Anthony Miller, WR/RB Sam Craft, TE Alan Cross, DE Ernest Suttles, LB Jackson Dillon, DB Reggis Ball

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: An offense that was one of the best in the AAC returns Lynch, Dorceus, Craft and running back Jarvis Cooper. It's a solid group that should put points on the board while a revamped defense matures. New defensive coordinator Galen Scott will have a talented, but young, group to mold, led by linebacker Jackson Dillon.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Tigers must replace key players on defense up front (Terry Redden and Martin Ifedi), at linebacker (Charles Harris and Tank Jakes) and in the secondary (Bobby McCain and Andrew Gaines). If the replacements struggle in starting roles and/or if durable QB Lynch is sidelined by injury, the Tigers will have a difficult time repeating last year's success.

PAXTON LYNCH
Photo by Justin Ford-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Entering a season in which a majority of starters were lost on defense, the Memphis offense will have to carry the load. With junior quarterback Paxton Lynch beginning his third season as the starter, the offense should be able to handle the responsibility.

Lynch directed the Tigers to a 10-win season and their first conference championship in 43 years by developing into the type of quarterback coach Justin Fuente is known for developing (see, Andy Dalton). Lynch, an effective runner, may become even more capable if he adds some weight during the offseason.

The offense was productive last season despite losing its top back, Doroland Dorceus, early in the season to a knee injury. Dorceus, a powerful, between-the-tackles runner, possesses a burst. He did not participate in spring workouts, but should be available in August. Power back Jarvis Cooper, a deceptively fast 250-pound runner, provides a strong complement to Dorceus.

Several young receivers — including Roderick Proctor and Phil Mayhue — contributed during their freshman seasons and should become more involved in the offense. Sophomore Anthony Miller, who missed last season with a knee injury, earned a starting nod at outside receiver in the spring.

DEFENSE

Fuente, entering his fourth season at Memphis, will field his most inexperienced defense. Oh, and he lost coordinator Barry Odom to Missouri, Odom's alma mater.

Fuente replaced Odom with linebackers coach Galen Scott, who served as the Tigers' defensive coordinator in 2011 under the previous head coach. Scott's linebackers will be mostly first-year starters, but they should step in seamlessly.

Wynton McManis started the first five games of last season before being sidelined by injury. The key loss was weakside linebacker Tank Jakes, the American Athletic Conference's co-Defensive Player of the Year, but junior outside linebacker Jackson Dillon should give the U of M another such candidate.

> "We have a long way to go ... but we've got a willing group that's going to do the work."
>
> — Justin Fuente

Ernest Suttles, a former Nebraska signee, and Latarius Brady shared starts at one defensive end spot last season, but should both start.

The big losses in the secondary were at cornerback, but juniors Dontrell Nelson and Chauncey Lanier had strong springs. Free safety Reggis Ball is the lone returning starter in the defensive backfield.

SPECIAL TEAMS

There is not a better place-kicker in the conference than junior Jake Elliott, who boomed a 54-yarder in a 55-48 bowl win over BYU to send the game into a second overtime. Sophomore punter Spencer Smith earned second-team all-conference honors in his rookie season.

OVERVIEW

After a 10-3 season and winning a share of the AAC title, the Tigers are poised to repeat. First they'll have to win the West Division — the AAC splits into two six-team divisions with the addition of Navy — and that's a strong possibility behind a potent offense. The offense should allow the defense to develop into what should be a solid unit by midseason.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Anthony Miller: The redshirt sophomore sat out last year with an injury, but impressed the coaching staff in the spring and had a solid outing in the spring game. Miller played himself into a starting role and will give Paxton Lynch another strong option.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	12	**Paxton Lynch***	6-7	230	Jr.
RB	22	Doroland Dorceus	5-10	205	So.
WR	3	Anthony Miller	5-11	190	So.
WR	11	**Sam Craft***	6-0	210	Jr.
WR	5	**Mose Frazier***	5-11	185	Sr.
TE	40	**Alan Cross***	6-1	245	Sr.
LT	77	**Taylor Fallin***	6-6	325	Sr.
LG	63	**Tyler Uselton***	6-3	310	Sr.
C	71	**Gabe Kuhn***	6-4	290	So.
RG	64	Zach Collins	6-4	285	So.
RT	74	Ryan Mack	6-5	305	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	14	Latarius Brady	6-2	275	Jr.
NT	58	Donald Pennington	6-2	295	Jr.
DT	48	**Ernest Suttles***	6-5	250	So.
LB	34	**Jackson Dillon***	6-6	230	Jr.
LB	16	Wynton McManis	6-1	225	Sr.
LB	53	Leonard Pegues	5-11	240	Sr.
LB	45	Noah Robinson	6-4	235	So.
CB	10	Dontrell Nelson	6-1	170	Jr.
CB	12	Chauncey Lanier	5-10	183	Jr.
SS	39	**Reggis Ball***	5-11	210	Sr.
FS	32	DaShaughn Terry	6-0	180	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	46	**Jake Elliott***	5-10	165	Jr.
P	36	**Spencer Smith***	6-1	175	So.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	MISSOURI STATE
Sept. 12	at Kansas
Sept. 19	at Bowling Green
Sept. 24	CINCINNATI
Oct. 2	at South Florida
Oct. 17	OLE MISS
Oct. 23	at Tulsa
Oct. 31	TULANE
Nov. 7	NAVY
Nov. 14	at Houston
Nov. 21	at Temple
Nov. 28	SMU

2014 RESULTS

W	AUSTIN PEAY	63-0
L	at UCLA	35-42
W	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	36-17
L	at Ole Miss	3-24
W	at Cincinnati	41-14
L	HOUSTON	24-28
W	at SMU	48-10
W	TULSA	40-20
W	at Temple	16-13
W	at Tulane	38-7
W	SOUTH FLORIDA	31-20
W	CONNECTICUT	41-10
	Miami Beach Bowl	
W	vs. BYU	55-48 (2OT)

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	36.2	21
Rushing	190.5	38
Passing	236.6	56
Total	427.1	46
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	19.5	11
Rushing	121.5	19
Passing	228.0	62
Total	349.5	27
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 11	+ 0.85	T-11

CINCINNATI | BEARCATS

AAC rank: 2 | Record: 9-4 | AAC record: 7-1 (T-1st) | Stadium: Nippert Stadium (35,000)

RANKING 42

BEARCATS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Cincinnati, Ohio
COACH: Tommy Tuberville — At Cincinnati: 18-8, 2 years; overall 148-85, 19 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Eddie Gran
DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Steve Clinkscale, Robert Prunty

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014, co-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2010
RETURNING STARTERS: 16; 9 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Gunner Kiel, RB Mike Boone, RB Hosey Williams, WR Shaq Washington, OT Parker Ehinger, DE Silverberry Mouhon, CB Adrian Witty, S Zach Edwards

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The passing game should be one of the most potent in America, with Kiel and his top seven receivers returning. Mike Boone was a revelation as a true freshman, including a 212-yard rushing game. Kicker Andrew Gantz is a reliable weapon.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The offensive line needs to keep Kiel upright, after some breakdowns left him exposed and injured last year. The defense has several red flags. Where will the pass rush come from? Who leads a relatively green linebacker corps? Special teams must show more production, especially on the return units.

GUNNER KIEL
Photo by Joe Robbins

OFFENSE

Junior quarterback Gunner Kiel came out with guns ablaze in the 2014 opener with six touchdown passes in his college debut. He went on to pass for 3,254 yards and tie the UC season record with 31 touchdown passes.

His top seven receivers return.

One question is durability. Kiel made all 13 starts last season, but left several games with rib and/or back injuries. UC trainers have worked with Kiel to improve his core strength.

Kiel also needs some improvement with decision-making, having thrown 13 interceptions. That said, he mostly fulfilled the hype of once being the No. 1-rated prep quarterback in America.

Slot receiver Shaq Washington (66 catches, four TDs) is on pace to become the UC career leader in receptions. Wideouts Mekale McKay and Chris Moore (eight TD catches each) are the deep threats in UC's four-receiver offense.

Mike Boone, who led UC with 650 yards rushing as a true freshman, and Hosey Williams were dueling for the No. 1 running back job entering summer, with Tion Green also in the picture.

The offensive line loses three-time all-league left tackle Eric Lefeld. Three starters return: Parker Ehinger (moving from right guard to left tackle), right tackle Justin Murray and center Deyshawn Bond.

DEFENSE

The Bearcats had one of the nation's worst defenses last season, and there is still reason to be concerned. The Cincinnati offense torched the defense for much of the spring. Fact is, UC's relative lack of defensive speed has been exposed when playing Power 5 schools.

Key losses include linebackers Jeff Luc (134 tackles) and Nick Temple (113) and defensive end Terrell Hartsfield (AAC-best nine sacks). Defensive end Silverberry Mouhon is the top returnee among the front seven.

Ball-hawking safety Zach Edwards (121 tackles) returns. The secondary should benefit from the return of veteran cornerback Adrian Witty, a vocal leader. He missed most of 2014 with a leg injury.

UC has its third defensive coordinator in three seasons under Tommy Tuberville, with Steve Clinkscale promoted from secondary/cornerbacks coach. Last year's coordinator, Hank Hughes, is now defensive line coach at Nebraska.

Clinkscale actually shares the title of co-defensive coordinator with defensive line coach Robert Prunty, but Clinkscale will call the plays on game days.

> "I think we're another recruiting year away from getting the 85 (players) out here that we want to get out here."
> — Tommy Tuberville

SPECIAL TEAMS

Place-kicker Andrew Gantz returns after a solid debut season, when he was second-team All-AAC. Gantz was 16 of 20 on field goal attempts. Punter Sam Geraci also made his UC debut last year and improved as the season progressed, finishing with a 39.4-yard average. UC produced little in the return game and has not had a touchdown on a return since the 2011 season.

OVERVIEW

Expect many high-scoring games, with a potent offense and a suspect defense. Kiel and one of the best offenses in school history might have to simply outgun opponents this season. That sounds good enough for the Bearcats to be among the AAC favorites.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Cortez Broughton: He took a medical redshirt after suffering a season-ending injury after appearing in two games as a true freshman. Coaches love the potential of Broughton, who originally committed to Middle Tennessee State. He is slated for a starting spot in 2015.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	11	**Gunner Kiel***	6-4	208	Jr.
RB	23	**Hosey Williams***	5-9	199	Sr.
WR	2	**Mekale McKay***	6-6	195	Sr.
WR	19	**Shaq Washington***	5-9	174	Sr.
WR	25	**Max Morrison***	6-1	173	Sr.
WR	15	**Chris Moore***	6-1	190	Sr.
LT	78	**Parker Ehinger***	6-7	315	Sr.
LG	73	Ryan Leahy	6-6	295	Jr.
C	59	**Deyshawn Bond***	6-2	298	Jr.
RG	30	Delonte Murray	6-5	311	Jr.
RT	74	**Justin Murray***	6-5	295	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	92	**Silverberry Mouhon***	6-4	252	Sr.
DT	96	Cortez Broughton	6-3	280	Fr.
DT	99	Alex Pace	6-2	295	Jr.
DE	56	Mark Wilson	6-3	225	So.
LB	23	Eric Wilson	6-2	225	Jr.
LB	6	Clemente Casseus	6-1	227	Sr.
LB	9	**Leviticus Payne***	5-10	192	Sr.
CB	13	**Grant Coleman***	6-0	176	Jr.
CB	8	Adrian Witty	5-10	187	Sr.
SS	29	**Andre Jones***	6-1	197	Jr.
FS	4	**Zach Edwards***	5-11	186	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	16	**Andrew Gantz***	5-9	158	So.
P	26	**Sam Geraci***	6-4	217	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	ALABAMA A&M
Sept. 12	TEMPLE
Sept. 19	at Miami (OH)
Sept. 24	at Memphis
Oct. 1	MIAMI
Oct. 17	at BYU
Oct. 24	CONNECTICUT
Oct. 31	UCF
Nov. 7	at Houston
Nov. 14	TULSA
Nov. 20	at South Florida
Nov. 28	at East Carolina

2014 RESULTS

W	TOLEDO	58-34
W	MIAMI (OH)	31-24
L	at Ohio State	28-50
L	MEMPHIS	14-41
L	at Miami	34-55
W	at SMU	41-3
W	SOUTH FLORIDA	34-17
W	at Tulane	38-14
W	EAST CAROLINA	54-46
W	at Connecticut	41-0
W	at Temple	14-6
W	HOUSTON	38-31
	Military Bowl	
L	vs. Virginia Tech	17-33

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	34.0	29
Rushing	156.5	72
Passing	303.6	13
Total	460.2	27
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.2	T-68
Rushing	183.7	85
Passing	255.4	97
Total	439.1	96
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 2	+ 0.15	T-53

UCF | KNIGHTS

AAC rank: 3 Record: 9-4 overall AAC: 7-1 (T-1st) Stadium: Bright House Networks Stadium (45,301)

RANKING 52

KNIGHTS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Orlando, Fla.
COACH: George O'Leary — At UCF: 81-60, 11 years; overall: 133-93, 19 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brent Key
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Chuck Bresnahan

RETURNING STARTERS: 10; 5 offense, 4 defense, punter
LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014, AAC co-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2011

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Justin Holman, RB William Stanback, WR Jordan Akins, DE Thomas Niles, DE Demetris Anderson, LB Chequan Burkett, LB Errol Clarke

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Knights are deep at quarterback and running back, and they will be operating behind an offensive line that has starting experience at each spot. Pressuring the passer looks to be the strength of the defense with the return of Niles and Anderson.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Newcomers are going to have to step up at wide receiver to keep opponents from stacking their defense against the run. The entire secondary also must be replaced. The Knights have a freshman kicker, and punter Caleb Houston averaged less than 39 yards per attempt last year.

JUSTIN HOLMAN
Photo by Mark Zerof-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

The return of quarterback Justin Holman and running backs William Stanback and Dontravious Wilson, along with a veteran offensive line, gives UCF's offense the chance for more success in 2015.

The Knights averaged 128.3 rushing yards per game last year, one of the worst marks in the country, and a good part of that was because Stanback and Wilson found themselves having to avoid potential tacklers in the backfield before they had an opportunity to get started.

With full-time returning starters Tarik Cook, Joey Grant, and Chavis Dickey in the middle of the line, flanked by tackles Aaron Evans and Chester Brown, who also logged starts in 2014, that should change.

Stanback overcame some early injury issues to rush for 697 yards in 10 games, and Wilson ran for 347. Junior Micah Reed started two times in 11 appearances and ran for 223 yards.

Holman, who took over in the second half of the opener and started every game thereafter, ended up throwing for 227 yards per game with 23 touchdown passes. He needs to cut back on his interceptions after throwing 14 picks in 392 attempts.

It doesn't help that the Knights lose their top four pass catchers. Sophomore Jordan Akins, who logged five starts, is the leading returner at wideout (12 receptions for 135 yards). Freshman Tre'Quan Smith was impressive in the spring.

DEFENSE

New coordinator Chuck Bresnahan has several holes to plug with the loss of the top five tacklers and the entire secondary.

The ability to mount a solid pass rush looks to be the defense's strength. End Thomas Niles had a team-high 7.5 sacks among his 49 tackles, and tackle Demetris Anderson, one of four returning starters along with Niles, end Luke Adams, and linebacker Chequan Burkett, was credited with 3.5.

In addition to Burkett (40 tackles) at linebacker, junior Errol Clarke had four starts after transferring from junior college and finished with 30 tackles.

The Knights will look to youngsters to build their secondary. Two redshirt freshmen, cornerback Chris Williams and safety Tre Neal, earned potential starting roles in the spring, and a third, Kyle Gibson, looks to be in the rotation. Junior cornerback Shaquill Griffin has three career starts.

> "We'll be a very solid football team when we put all the nuts and bolts together and everything else."
> — Coach George O'Leary

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Caleb Houston returns for his third season after averaging just under 39 yards per attempt last year. Of his 54 attempts, 17 were downed inside the opponent's 20-yard line. Redshirt freshman Matthew Wright is slated to take over for departed Shawn Moffitt, who was 17 of 23 on fieldgoal attempts last season.

OVERVIEW

The Knights are 15-1 in conference play the last two years combined, but the run of success looks to be in jeopardy unless newcomers step up on defense. The offense figures to be better running the football, but the loss of big-play receiver Breshad Perriman leaves a big void in the receiving corps.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Tre'Quan Smith: Smith earned a starting spot with his play in the spring. Out of Village Academy in Delray Beach, Fla., he recorded 71 receptions for 1,760 yards his last two years in high school. He also rushed for 429 yards as a senior and had 10 interceptions in his last two seasons playing in the secondary.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	13	Justin Holman*	6-4	213	Jr.
RB	28	William Stanback*	6-1	225	Jr.
HB	39	Joseph Puopolo	5-10	242	Sr.
WR	88	Jordan Akins	6-3	237	So.
WR	80	Tre'Quan Smith	6-1	180	Fr.
TE	85	Kevin Miller	6-4	255	Sr.
LT	66	Aaron Evans	6-5	290	So.
LG	61	Tarik Cook*	6-2	291	Sr.
C	55	Joey Grant*	6-3	286	Sr.
RG	79	Chavis Dickey*	6-4	300	So.
RT	71	Chester Brown	6-5	317	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	69	Thomas Niles*	6-2	270	Sr.
DT	94	Demetris Anderson*	6-2	299	Sr.
DT	90	Lance McDowdell	6-4	310	Sr.
DE	92	Luke Adams*	6-4	260	Jr.
LB	50	Domenic Spencer	5-10	229	Sr.
LB	40	Chequan Burkett*	6-2	218	So.
LB	51	Errol Clarke	6-1	240	Jr.
CB	31	Chris Williams	6-0	180	Fr.
CB	10	Shaquill Griffin	6-1	192	Jr.
S	46	Jordan Franks	6-3	225	So.
S	33	Tre Neal	6-1	185	Fr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	49	Matthew Wright	6-1	170	Fr.
P	36	Caleb Houston*	6-1	200	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	FIU
Sept. 12	at Stanford
Sept. 19	FURMAN
Sept. 26	at South Carolina
Oct. 3	at Tulane
Oct. 10	CONNECTICUT
Oct. 17	at Temple
Oct. 24	HOUSTON
Oct. 31	at Cincinnati
Nov. 7	at Tulsa
Nov. 19	EAST CAROLINA
Nov. 27	SOUTH FLORIDA

2014 RESULTS

L	vs. Penn State (Dublin, Ireland)	24-26
L	at Missouri	10-38
W	BETHUNE-COOKMAN	41-7
W	at Houston	17-12
W	BYU (OT)	31-24
W	TULANE	20-13
W	TEMPLE	34-14
L	at Connecticut	29-37
W	TULSA	31-7
W	SMU	53-7
W	at South Florida	16-0
W	at East Carolina	32-30
	St. Petersburg Bowl	
L	vs. NC State	27-34

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	28.9	69
Rushing	128.3	103
Passing	235.3	58
Total	363.6	99
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	19.2	9
Rushing	104.3	6
Passing	194.2	21
Total	298.5	5
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 1	- 0.1	T-66

HOUSTON | COUGARS

AAC rank: 4 Record: 8-5 AAC record: 5-3 (T-4th) Stadium: TDECU Stadium (40,000)

RANKING 55

COUGARS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Houston, Texas
COACH: Tom Herman — At Houston and overall: 1st year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Major Applewhite
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Todd Orlando

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2006
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 5 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Greg Ward Jr., RB Kenneth Farrow, LB Steven Taylor, CB William Jackson, SS Adrian McDonald, FS Trevon Stewart, K Kyle Bullard

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The secondary is experienced and talented and will be one of the better defensive units in the AAC. Ward has the makings of a playmaker. He and Farrow could make Houston's offense one of the more difficult to game plan for in the AAC.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: While gifted, Ward lacks size. In an offense in which he'll run plenty, his 178-pound frame will be hard pressed to make it through the season injury-free. There isn't much experience at wide receiver to help him, either, so teams likely will stack the box to stop the run. The defensive switch to a 3-4 will take some time, especially without much to work with in the front seven.

OFFENSE

Tom Herman had recent success with dual-threat quarterbacks at Ohio State.

As Houston's new head coach, he'll try to make junior Greg Ward Jr. as good a passer as he is a runner, which could make him one of the best in the AAC.

Ward was a wide receiver in the first five games of last season before taking over at quarterback. The eight-game starter at quarterback threw for 2,010 yards and rushed for 573, though his 5-11, 178-pound frame could be a concern.

Two returning starters on the line — left guard Ben Dew and right tackle Alex Cooper — and a third who was a starter in 2013 (left tackle Zach Johnson) will be in charge of keeping Ward healthy. But the main weapon in that regard is a rushing attack that was second in the AAC last season with 183.8 yards per game.

Senior Kenneth Farrow is back after rushing for 1,037 yards and a league-best 14 touchdowns.

Experience at wide receiver isn't as promising, though. Demarcus Ayers, the team's leading returning receiver, had just 335 receiving yards in 2014.

DEFENSE

The secondary is loaded with experience and playmakers. Strong safety Adrian McDonald earned first-team all-conference honors, and cornerback William Jackson was a second-team selection. Free safety Trevon Stewart and cornerback Brandon Wilson are capable of similar results this season.

The main problem is that there are just two returning starters in the front seven, and the Cougars are converting from a 4-3 to a 3-4 scheme under new coordinator Todd Orlando.

Outside linebacker Steven Taylor, the team's leading returning tackler (76), is a playmaker who also forced three fumbles last season. None of the other three linebacker spots has anyone who started there in the past, though outside linebacker Tyus Bowser did start twice last season as a defensive end.

Up front, B.J. Singleton started 11 games last season, but there isn't much else in terms of starting experience. There isn't a complete void of talent on the line, but there doesn't appear to be much star power, either.

KENNETH FARROW
Photo by Ray Carlin-USA TODAY Sports

"We will have the talent to compete for championships."

— Tom Herman

SPECIAL TEAMS

Junior Demarcus Ayers was the 2013 AAC co-Special Teams Player of the Year, and he followed up with a solid year as a kick and punt returner. Kicker Kyle Bullard was a Lou Groza Award semifinalist last year, making 16 of 22 field goal attempts, with a long of 51. Punter Logan Piper averaged 39.3 yards per attempt last season.

OVERVIEW

The pressure is on Tom Herman in his first year. That's what happens when a school fires a coach who had back-to-back eight-win seasons. The Cougars don't seem to have much wiggle room for injury this season as depth is lacking. There are pieces in place, especially on offense, that could carry Houston into contention for a title, but there isn't much margin for error if health goes south.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Isaiah Johnson: Johnson, who redshirted last year, gives the Cougars a big receiver who made the catch of the spring game and has shown flashes of being a big play threat. Not only does he have great hands and good size, the former high school track star has downfield speed. Oregon transfer Chance Allen is another new receiver to watch.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	1	**Greg Ward Jr.***	5-11	178	Jr.
RB	35	**Kenneth Farrow***	5-10	218	Sr.
WR	14	Isaiah Johnson	6-3	190	Fr.
WR	10	**Demarcus Ayers***	5-10	178	Jr.
WR	88	Steven Dunbar	6-2	195	So.
TE	45	Tyler McCloskey	6-2	232	Jr.
LT	71	Zach Johnson	6-6	295	Sr.
LG	63	**Ben Dew***	6-4	315	Sr.
C	73	Colton Freeman	6-4	286	Fr.
RG	79	Josh Thomas	6-6	315	So.
RT	60	**Alex Cooper***	6-4	297	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	93	**B.J. Singleton***	6-4	290	Jr.
DT	91	Nick Thurman	6-4	290	So.
DE	94	Cameron Malveaux	6-6	270	Jr.
LB	81	Tyus Bowser	6-3	228	Jr.
LB	9	Matthew Adams	6-0	208	So.
LB	44	Elandon Roberts	6-0	230	Sr.
LB	41	**Steven Taylor***	6-1	220	Jr.
CB	26	**Brandon Wilson***	6-0	198	Jr.
CB	3	**William Jackson***	6-1	185	Sr.
SS	16	**Adrian McDonald***	5-10	190	Sr.
FS	23	**Trevon Stewart***	5-9	185	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	39	**Kyle Bullard***	5-11	170	Sr.
P	31	**Logan Piper***	6-1	200	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	TENNESSEE TECH
Sept. 12	at Louisville
Sept. 26	TEXAS STATE
Oct. 3	at Tulsa
Oct. 8	SMU
Oct. 16	at Tulane
Oct. 24	at UCF
Oct. 31	VANDERBILT
Nov. 7	CINCINNATI
Nov. 14	MEMPHIS
Nov. 21	at Connecticut
Nov. 27	NAVY

2014 RESULTS

L	UTSA	7-27
W	GRAMBLING STATE	47-0
L	at BYU	25-33
W	TENNESSEE TECH	47-14
L	UCF	12-17
W	at Memphis	28-24
W	TEMPLE	31-10
W	at South Florida	27-3
L	TULANE	24-31
W	TULSA	38-28
W	at SMU	35-9
L	at Cincinnati	31-38
	Armed Forces Bowl	
W	vs. Pittsburgh	35-34

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	29.8	57
Rushing	183.8	42
Passing	230.2	64
Total	414.1	55
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	20.6	15
Rushing	143.3	37
Passing	200.1	27
Total	343.4	20
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 8	+ 0.62	T-22

NAVY | MIDSHIPMEN

AAC rank: 5 Record: 8-5 (Independent) Stadium: Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium (34,000)

RANKING 62

MIDSHIPMEN at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Annapolis, Md.
COACH: Ken Niumatalolo: At Navy and overall: 57-35, 8 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Ivin Jasper
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Buddy Green

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: None
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2011
RETURNING STARTERS: 11; 4 offense, 6 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Keenan Reynolds, FB Chris Swain, WR Jamir Tillman, OG E.K. Binns, NG Bernie Sarra, DE Will Anthony, ILB Daniel Gonzales, CB Brendon Clements

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Scoring points shouldn't be a problem since Navy returns one of the finest quarterbacks in program history and plenty of other proven weapons. The fullback dive is the bread-and-butter of the triple-option, and Swain is a real bruiser. Tillman is a tall, long athlete who developed into a play-maker in 2014. DeBrandon Sanders leads a slew of dynamic slotbacks.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Navy's four linebackers are asked to do an awful lot in Buddy Green's 3-4 scheme, and the Mids have three new starters at the position. Gonzales is the only proven performer. Youngsters such as Micah Thomas, Myles Davenport and D.J. Palmore possess impressive size and athleticism, but have limited game experience.

KEENAN REYNOLDS
Photo by Tomasso DeRosa

OFFENSE

Senior quarterback Keenan Reynolds already owns a slew of school records and ranks fourth in NCAA history with 64 rushing touchdowns. Reynolds, a rare four-year starter in Navy's unique triple-option offense, boasts a 21-11 record.

He will have plenty of proven weapons at his disposal with senior fullback Chris Swain, senior slotback DeBrandon Sanders and junior wide receiver Jamir Tillman leading the way.

Swain, a powerfully-built 245-pounder, is coming off a strong campaign in which he displayed vastly improved vision while rushing for 693 yards. Sanders, a 5-7, 160-pound jitterbug, has averaged 8.0 yards per rush and 19.3 yards per reception during his career. Tillman, smooth and fluid at 6-4, emerged as a big-play threat in 2014, averaging almost 20 yards on 20 catches.

Navy must rebuild its offensive line after graduating three starters. Left guard E.K. Binns, entering his third season as a starter, takes over as the leader of the unit.

DEFENSE

The Midshipmen suffered significant losses, including inside linebacker Jordan Drake, end Paul Quessenberry, outside linebacker Chris Johnson and free safety Parrish Gaines, who made most of the defensive calls.

Senior nose guard Bernie Sarra is one of the team's strongest players and has done an outstanding job of holding the point of attack since moving into the starting lineup as a sophomore.

Right end Will Anthony was the breakout performer of 2014, playing with tremendous consistency and leading the team with 11 tackles for loss. He had 67 tackles, a high total for a lineman.

Navy's 3-4 scheme requires the inside linebackers to make the majority of tackles, and Daniel Gonzales stepped up as a sophomore, ranking second with 86 tackles to go with three interceptions.

Junior Brendon Clements has started 20 straight games at cornerback and displayed superb ball instincts along with sure tackling. He has 107 career tackles and eight pass breakups. Quincy Adams started all 13 games at the opposite corner and was Navy's third-leading tackler.

> "It's exciting, but at the same time there is some anxiety because we don't know what it's like to play in a league."
> — Ken Niumatalolo

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Gavin Jernigan, the backup punter in the previous two seasons, will get the first crack at replacing Pablo Beltran, a four-year starter who ranks second in program history for career average. Austin Grebe took over as the starting place-kicker in the seventh game of last season and made all six of his field goal attempts.

Navy lost another four-year standout in long-snapper Joe Cardona, drafted in the fifth round by New England.

OVERVIEW

Navy joins the American Athletic Conference following more than a century as an independent. The Midshipmen have a 34-27-1 record against current AAC members and has played schools such as SMU, East Carolina and Tulane on a regular basis. Navy now adds winning a conference championship to its long-standing goals of beating service academy rivals Army and Air Force, and qualifying for a bowl game. Navy should be able to achieve both of those latter goals again this year.

TOP NEWCOMER

OL Andrew Wood: He received 15 scholarship offers, including from the likes of Cal, Duke, Vanderbilt and Virginia. Wood chose the Naval Academy because of lifelong dream to study aeronautical engineering and become a pilot. He was a consensus all-state selection in Tennessee as a junior and senior.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	19	**Keenan Reynolds***	5-11	195	Sr.
RB	25	Demond Brown	5-9	201	Sr.
RB	21	DeBrandon Sanders	5-7	160	Sr.
FB	37	Chris Swain	6-1	245	Sr.
WR	4	**Jamir Tillman***	6-4	206	Jr.
WR	87	Brandon Colon	6-4	218	So.
LT	79	Blake Copeland	6-4	258	Jr.
LG	57	**E.K. Binns***	6-3	295	Sr.
C	64	Blaze Ryder	5-11	277	Sr.
RG	60	Ben Tamburello	6-2	275	Sr.
RT	65	**Joey Gaston***	6-5	281	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	52	Amos Mason	6-1	250	Jr.
NG	77	**Bernard Sarra***	6-1	297	Sr.
DE	90	**Will Anthony***	6-1	254	Sr.
LB	38	William Tuider	6-2	213	Jr.
LB	44	Micah Thomas	6-1	249	So.
LB	58	**Daniel Gonzales***	6-2	218	Jr.
LB	45	D.J. Palmore	6-3	227	So.
CB	1	**Brendon Clements***	5-11	188	Jr.
CB	5	**Quincy Adams***	5-11	200	Sr.
SS	17	**Kwazel Bertrand***	6-0	192	Sr.
FS	2	Lorentez Barbour	6-1	194	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	43	**Austin Grebe***	6-0	192	Sr.
P	16	Gavin Jernigan	6-3	208	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	COLGATE
Sept. 19	EAST CAROLINA
Sept. 26	at Connecticut
Oct. 3	AIR FORCE
Oct. 10	at Notre Dame
Oct. 24	TULANE
Oct. 31	SOUTH FLORIDA
Nov. 7	at Memphis
Nov. 14	SMU
Nov. 21	at Tulsa
Nov. 27	at Houston
Dec. 12	vs. ARMY (Philadelphia)

2014 RESULTS

L	vs. Ohio State	17-34
W	at Temple	31-24
W	at Texas State	35-21
L	RUTGERS	24-31
L	WESTERN KENTUCKY	27-36
L	at Air Force	21-30
W	VMI	51-14
W	SAN JOSE STATE	41-31
L	vs. Notre Dame	39-49
W	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	52-19
W	at South Alabama	42-40
W	vs. Army	17-10
	Poinsettia Bowl	
W	vs. San Diego State	17-16

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	31.8	T-43
Rushing	338.1	2
Passing	81.4	124
Total	419.5	50
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.3	70
Rushing	198.6	94
Passing	205.2	31
Total	403.8	70
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 4	- 0.31	T-89

TEMPLE | OWLS

AAC rank: 6 Record: 6-6 AAC record: 4-4 (6th) Stadium: Lincoln Financial Field (68,532)

RANKING 68

OWLS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Philadelphia, Pa.
COACH: Matt Rhule — At Temple and overall: 8-16, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Marcus Satterfield
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Phil Snow

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1967, Middle Atlantic — University Division
LAST BOWL: 2011, New Mexico
RETURNING STARTERS: 18; 7 offense, 10 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB P.J. Walker, RB Jahad Thomas, WR John Christopher, C Kyle Friend, DE Praise Martin-Oguike, LB Tyler Matakevich, LB Nate D. Smith, CB Kareem Ali

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Owls have experience at key areas, and Walker should learn a ton from an up-and-down sophomore season. The defense does not allow many big plays and has playmakers in each unit. With Matakevich and Smith leading the way, the Owls will be a good tackling team and should again have the top defense in the AAC.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Temple's starting offensive line is among the team's strengths, but experienced depth along the unit is an issue. Finding playmakers on the perimeter is also a question. The kicking game has been an issue since Rhule arrived, and Temple still has to prove it can consistently make easy field goal attempts.

OFFENSE

Temple coach Matt Rhule has done a good job building the program with talent and energy, and he is in the process of getting some big-time players. But much of the success this season will hinge on the development of quarterback P.J. Walker.

Walker was very good as a freshman (using freshman standards), but careless throws and too many turnovers plagued the Owls, who could have been markedly better than 6-6.

Walker brings a dual-threat mentality, but he does have interesting options in the running game in Jahad Thomas and Jamie Gilmore, who combined to run for more than 600 yards last season.

Making up for the loss of leading receiver Jalen Fitzpatrick will be tough. His 53 catches were more than twice as many as anyone else, but it could mean a step up for John Christopher and Romond Deloatch, who has the size to develop into a red-zone threat.

Kyle Friend, with 33 career starts, anchors an experienced line, where four players with a season's worth of starting experience return. There is not much depth behind them.

DEFENSE

One thing is certain about the defense — linebacker Tyler Matakevich will be tackling a lot of ball carriers and making plays everywhere on the field. He surpassed 100 tackles in each of his first three seasons, and he combines with Nate D. Smith to cut off a bunch of plays after only a few yards.

The Owls have depth and experience on the defensive line, and a big-time playmaker could be coming if defensive tackle Greg Webb, a North Carolina bounce-back who went through the junior college ranks, gets eligible. He could be a game-changer in the middle.

The secondary is intriguing, and the corners could become the best duo in the AAC in a few years. Sophomore Sean Chandler, who spurned opportunities from Power 5 conference teams coming out of high school, is back and now experienced. One-time Maryland commit Kareem Ali signed with the Owls and should make an impact early.

Beyond Ali and Chandler is a wealth of depth and athleticism, so the back end should be fine.

TYLER MATAKEVICH
Photo by John Geliebter-USA TODAY Sports

"I thought P.J. had a good spring game. He made the right checks, got us into the right plays and he made some nice deep throws."

— Matt Rhule on QB P.J. Walker

SPECIAL TEAMS

The punting game is solid, but if anyone knows anything about Temple, it is that field goal kicking was a huge letdown in the past few seasons. The Owls cover kicks well, but they don't kick field goals well — Austin Jones was 10 of 16 on field goal attempts shorter than 40 yards last season. Does this mean senior Tyler Mayes wins the job this camp?

OVERVIEW

The Owls have a chance to win the AAC, and a big start in the non-conference season could make Temple a name to know come October. The Owls start against Penn State and at Cincinnati, and both are winnable games, given the strength of Temple's defense. The game against the Bearcats could be big in determining the East division; win that, and Temple circles a visit from Central Florida on Oct. 17.

TOP NEWCOMER

CB Kareem Ali: He originally committed to Maryland, but he changed his mind to stay at home and play for the Owls. Ali, from Timber Creek High in Erial, N.J., could play as a freshman because of his athleticism and his ability to turn his hips and run.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	11	**P.J. Walker***	6-1	200	Jr.
RB	34	Jahad Thomas	5-10	170	Jr.
WR	7	**John Christopher***	5-10	185	Sr.
WR	17	**Brandon Shippen***	5-11	189	Sr.
WR	84	Romond Deloatch	6-4	225	Jr.
TE	86	Colin Thompson	6-4	250	Jr.
LT	67	Semaj Reed	6-7	300	So.
LG	75	**Shahbaz Ahmed***	6-3	285	Sr.
C	79	**Kyle Friend***	6-2	305	Sr.
RG	68	**Brendan McGowan***	6-4	300	Jr.
RT	71	**Eric Lofton***	6-5	300	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	50	**Praise Martin-Oguike***	6-2	250	Jr.
NT	72	**Hershey Walton***	6-4	300	Sr.
DT	9	**Matt Ioannidis***	6-4	285	Sr.
DE	56	**Sharif Finch***	6-4	240	Jr.
LB	8	**Tyler Matakevich***	6-1	235	Sr.
LB	35	**Nate D. Smith***	6-0	225	Sr.
LB	2	**Avery Williams***	5-10	210	Jr.
CB	3	**Sean Chandler***	5-11	180	So.
CB	12	Kareem Ali	5-11	175	Fr.
SS	32	**Will Hayes***	5-9	182	Sr.
FS	21	**Alex Wells***	6-0	200	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	95	Tyler Mayes	6-2	200	Sr.
P	43	**Alex Starzyk***	6-3	205	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	PENN STATE
Sept. 12	at Cincinnati
Sept. 19	at Massachusetts
Oct. 2	at Charlotte
Oct. 10	TULANE
Oct. 17	UCF
Oct. 22	at East Carolina
Oct. 31	NOTRE DAME
Nov. 6	at SMU
Nov. 14	at South Florida
Nov. 21	MEMPHIS
Nov. 28	CONNECTICUT

2014 RESULTS

W	at Vanderbilt	37-7
L	NAVY	24-31
W	DELAWARE STATE	59-0
W	at Connecticut	36-10
W	TULSA	35-24
L	at Houston	10-31
L	at UCF	14-34
W	EAST CAROLINA	20-10
L	MEMPHIS	13-16
L	at Penn State	13-30
L	CINCINNATI	6-14
W	at Tulane	10-3

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	23.1	97
Rushing	107.8	115
Passing	200.7	86
Total	308.4	117
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	17.5	4
Rushing	160.2	52
Passing	186.9	13
Total	347.1	24
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 3	+ 0.25	T-45

EAST CAROLINA | PIRATES

AAC rank: 7 Record: 8-5 AAC record: 5-3 (T-4th) Stadium: Dowdy-Ficklen (50,000)

RANKING 77

PIRATES at a GLANCE

COACH: Ruffin McNeill — At ECU: 37-27, 5 years; overall: 38-27, 6 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Dave Nichol
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Rick Smith

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2009
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 6 offense, 6 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: WR Isaiah Jones, WR Davon Grayson, WR Jimmy Williams, LB Zeek Bigger, CB Josh Hawkins, FS Dominique Lennon, LB Montese Overton, DE Johnathon White

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: As offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley left for Oklahoma, McNeill promoted Dave Nichol to that position. This should be a key in establishing continuity with so many position openings on offense. ECU has possibly its deepest roster in the McNeill regime, even after replacing half the starters.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The pass-catch firepower of Shane Carden to Justin Hardy won't be easily, or quickly, replaced. The schedule is challenging, too, with road trips to Florida and BYU, as well as a home date with Virginia Tech, in addition to the AAC opponents.

JOSH HAWKINS
Photo by Jeremy Brevard-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

There is a three-player battle to replace record-setting quarterback Shane Carden, while several wide receiver battles will determine the order at this deep position.

Sophomore Kurt Benkert had an edge over juniors Blake Kemp and Cody Keith to replace Carden coming out of spring football. Benkert is a drop-back quarterback whose touch and agility will allow him to solidify the job.

Justin Hardy and Cam Worthy finished impressive careers, thinning the production at wide receiver. Isaiah Jones caught 81 passes for 830 yards a year ago and looks to be the primary option this time around. Davon Grayson and Jimmy Williams can be big-time playmakers, as well.

Chris Hairston is the prime candidate to replace Breon Allen in the backfield. He stepped up to lead the Pirates in rushing in two of their last three games, and he also had a 153-yard effort against Tulane. The Pirates return three seniors — Ike Harris, Quincy McKinney and Dontae Levingston — on a deep offensive line.

DEFENSE

The defense has improved steadily in coach Ruffin McNeill's six years, and it was outstanding against the run and on third down last season.

Linebacker is the team's defensive strength, with Zeek Bigger and Montese Overton returning as East Carolina's leading and third-leading tacklers. Bigger, All-AAC a year ago, will man the inside while Overton, who had 11.5 tackles for loss in 2014, starts outside. Improving Joe Allely, Reece Speight and Jordan Adams can step into other openings.

ECU loses playmakers Detric Allen and Lamar Ivey in the secondary. Cornerback Josh Hawkins, a 2014 Jim Thorpe Award finalist, and free safety Domonique Lennon will be the leaders of that unit. A key contributor will be Rocco Scarfone, who will start opposite of Hawkins. In his first start against Florida, he had 11 tackles.

Johnathon White is the only returnee for ECU on the front three, where he will be joined by Terrell Stanley, a key contributor two years ago, who returns after complications from an auto accident. Fred Presley will also figure into the mix as he led ECU with six sacks.

> "He reminds me of all the quarterbacks I've been watching for 16 years in this offense. ... Kurt is going to be fine."
> — Ruffin McNeill on Kurt Benkert

SPECIAL TEAMS

Worth Gregory gives the Pirates stability at punter. He averaged 43.6 yards per attempt last season. The kicking game is open with Davis Plowman expected to take over for Warren Harvey.

Replacing Hardy in the return game won't be easy, but a plethora of speedy Pirates will continue to try through fall camp. Hardy was a dynamic return specialist, so this is a key area to fill with the depth on the roster.

OVERVIEW

At 8-5, East Carolina had a successful AAC debut as the Pirates tied for second, although they lost to Florida in the Birmingham Bowl. It looks like a rebuilding year in Greenville with so many positions open due to graduation. Good news: Depth all over the roster is at its height in McNeill's sixth year, and growing pains might be kept to a minimum.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Deondre Farrier: He is a big-play receiver who de-committed from Florida. Farrier runs a 4.48-second 40 and should fit immediately into a rebuilding offense. He averaged 15.9 yards per catch for Lake Nona High School in Orlando, Fla.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	6	Kurt Benkert	6-3	220	So.
RB	22	Chris Hairston	6-0	205	Sr.
WR	87	Terrell Green	6-4	209	So.
WR	**7**	**Isaiah Jones***	**6-1**	**197**	**Jr.**
WR	**85**	**Davon Grayson***	**6-2**	**195**	**Jr.**
TE	80	Bryce Williams	6-6	258	Sr.
LT	**69**	**Ike Harris***	**6-7**	**309**	**Sr.**
LG	**72**	**Quincy McKinney***	**6-4**	**288**	**Sr.**
C	**65**	**J.T. Boyd***	**6-4**	**298**	**Jr.**
RG	55	Larry Williams	6-4	331	So.
RT	**71**	**Dontae Levingston***	**6-4**	**306**	**Sr.**

DEFENSE

DE	66	Terrell Stanley	6-2	268	Sr.
NT	56	Demetri McGill	6-1	314	Jr.
DE	**94**	**Johnathon White***	**6-4**	**282**	**Sr.**
LB	**51**	**Montese Overton***	**6-3**	**221**	**Sr.**
LB	**44**	**Zeek Bigger***	**6-2**	**216**	**Sr.**
LB	**45**	**Jordan Williams***	**6-0**	**230**	**So.**
LB	57	Joe Allely	6-1	230	So.
CB	**28**	**Josh Hawkins***	**5-10**	**185**	**Sr.**
CB	10	Rocco Scarfone	5-11	178	Sr.
SS	22	Terrell Richardson	6-0	211	Jr.
FS	**31**	**Domonique Lennon***	**6-2**	**210**	**Sr.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	38	Davis Plowman	5-10	204	Jr.
P	**40**	**Worth Gregory***	**6-3**	**209**	**Jr.**

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	TOWSON
Sept. 12	at Florida
Sept. 19	at Navy
Sept. 26	VIRGINIA TECH
Oct. 3	at SMU
Oct. 10	at BYU
Oct. 17	TULSA
Oct. 22	TEMPLE
Oct. 30	at Connecticut
Nov. 7	SOUTH FLORIDA
Nov. 19	at UCF
Nov. 28	CINCINNATI

2014 RESULTS

W	NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL	52-7
L	at South Carolina	23-33
W	at Virginia Tech	28-21
W	NORTH CAROLINA	70-41
W	SMU	45-24
W	at South Florida	28-17
W	CONNECTICUT	31-21
L	at Temple	10-20
L	at Cincinnati	46-54
W	TULANE	34-6
W	at Tulsa	49-32
L	UCF	30-32
	Birmingham Bowl	
L	vs. Florida	20-28

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	35.8	T-22
Rushing	161.1	64
Passing	371.9	3
Total	533.0	5
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.8	53
Rushing	111.8	11
Passing	255.5	98
Total	367.3	37
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 4	- 0.31	T-89

SOUTH FLORIDA | BULLS

AAC rank: 8 | Record: 4-8 | AAC: 3-5 (7th) | Stadium: Raymond James (65,857)

RANKING 88

BULLS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Tampa, Florida
COACH: Willie Taggart — At USF: 6-18, 2 years; overall: 22-38, 5 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Danny Hope, David Reaves
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tom Allen

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: None
LAST BOWL: 2010, Meineke Car Care
RETURNING STARTERS: 11; 4 offense, 6 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Quinton Flowers, RB Marlon Mack, TE Sean Price, LB Auggie Sanchez, LB Nigel Harris, DB Jamie Byrd, CB Johnny Ward, SS Nate Godwin

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Bulls seemed to have adapted to the new 4-2-5 defensive scheme in the spring and have enough defensive backs to handle the switch. Mack was a 1,000-yard rusher as a freshman, and RB Darius Tice is a solid backup. Tight end is in good hands as well.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The offensive line returns only two players with starting experience, and three of the top four receivers are gone. Flowers got one start last year, but was only 8 of 20 passing in five appearances. Half of the front-six starters on defense are gone.

OFFENSE

Junior Mike White, who started 15 games for USF in the past two seasons, decided to transfer after a three-way spring competition at quarterback with senior Steven Bench and sophomore Quinton Flowers. The job of running the new up-tempo attack likely will fall to Flowers.

He burned his redshirt at midseason last year when the Bulls had problems at the spot. Flowers made five appearances with one start, completing 6 of 15 passes for 105 yards against SMU in one of USF's four wins.

The Bulls are set at running back with Marlon Mack, who rushed for 1,041 yards in 2014, the third-highest total by a Bulls back and most-ever by a true freshman. Darius Tice also returns to give Mack some relief.

The concerns are at wide receiver and the offensive line.

Junior Rodney Adams (23 catches, 323 yards) had three starts in 10 appearances last year and has the most experience among the wideouts. Kentucky transfer A.J. Legree and sophomore Ryeshene Bronson (one start in 2014, but only three catches), along with veteran tight end Sean Price (14-207), will have to carry a big load.

DEFENSE

The Bulls have abandoned the 3-4 base and gone to a 4-2-5 scheme under new coordinator Tom Allen, who comes to Tampa after coaching linebackers and coordinating special teams at Ole Miss.

The switch will take advantage of the experience the Bulls have in the secondary, where four starters return — senior Jamie Byrd, now playing the "Husky" position after starting 12 games at safety, juniors Johnny Ward and Nate Godwin, and sophomore Devin Abraham. Byrd led the Bulls in tackles last year with 95.

Sophomore Lamar Robbins, who started five of the last six games, could push Abraham out of a starting corner spot. Sophomore Tajee Fullwood, who started the last three games, has the job at safety going into the fall.

The Bulls have only two linebackers, and both are returning starters. Junior Nigel Harris led the team in tackles for loss with 10.5 last year, and sophomore Auggie Sanchez was No. 4 in tackles (66) after moving from fullback. Senior Tashon Whitehurst (four starts in 2014) figures to play a prominent part in the rotation after a strong finish to the spring.

MARLON MACK
Photo by Joe Robbins

"I'm very excited about this football team."

— Coach Willie Taggart

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Mattias Ciabatti was the top punter in the AAC last year. His 44.5-yard average earned first team all-conference honors. He returns, but the Bulls lose a key weapon with the departure of kicker Marvin Kloss (13 of 17 field goal attempts). Sophomore Emilio Nadelman looks to take over.

OVERVIEW

The key to the season will be for the offense to do enough to take some of the pressure off what could be an effective defense. Any success might have to come after an early hole; three of the Bulls' first four games are against Florida State, Maryland and Memphis.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR A.J. Legree: A transfer from Kentucky who sat out last season, Legree will be in the rotation at wideout. He had 19 receptions in 24 games for the Wildcats and was first-team Class 3A all-state in his senior year in high school at Fort White, Florida. He also was a state champion high jumper with a leap of 6-10.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	9	Quinton Flowers	6-0	217	So.
FB	47	Kennard Swanson	6-0	253	So.
RB	**5**	**Marlon Mack***	**6-0**	**195**	**So.**
WR	87	Rodney Adams	6-1	190	Jr.
WR	81	Ryeshene Bronson	6-3	187	So.
TE	**12**	**Sean Price***	**6-3**	**250**	**Sr.**
LT	75	Kofi Amichia	6-4	290	Jr.
LG	**64**	**Thor Jozwiak***	**6-4**	**321**	**Sr.**
C	74	Cameron Ruff	6-3	313	So.
RG	**66**	**Brynjar Gudmundsson***	**6-4**	**305**	**Sr.**
RT	71	Mak Djulbegovic	6-5	293	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	**91**	**Eric Lee***	**6-3**	**248**	**Sr.**
DT	90	James Hamilton	6-2	312	Sr.
DT	10	Deadrin Senat	6-1	300	So.
DE	55	Zack Bullock	6-3	233	Sr.
LB	**43**	**Auggie Sanchez***	**6-2**	**241**	**So.**
LB	**57**	**Nigel Harris***	**6-0**	**220**	**Jr.**
DB	**2**	**Jamie Byrd***	**5-11**	**184**	**Sr.**
CB	6	Lamar Robbins	6-2	200	Jr.
CB	**24**	**Johnny Ward***	**6-0**	**178**	**Jr.**
SS	**36**	**Nate Godwin***	**5-10**	**202**	**Jr.**
FS	13	Tajee Fullwood	6-2	209	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	35	Emilio Nadelman	5-6	173	So.
P	**49**	**Mattias Ciabatti***	**6-0**	**189**	**Sr.**

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	FLORIDA A&M
Sept. 12	at Florida State
Sept. 19	at Maryland
Oct. 2	MEMPHIS
Oct. 10	SYRACUSE
Oct. 17	at Connecticut
Oct. 24	SMU
Oct. 31	at Navy
Nov. 7	at East Carolina
Nov. 14	at Temple
Nov. 20	CINCINNATI
Nov. 27	at UCF

2014 RESULTS

W	WESTERN CAROLINA	36-31
L	MARYLAND	17-24
L	NC STATE	17-49
W	CONNECTICUT	17-14
L	at Wisconsin	10-27
L	EAST CAROLINA	17-28
W	at Tulsa	38-30
L	at Cincinnati	17-34
L	HOUSTON	3-27
W	at SMU	14-13
L	at Memphis	20-31
L	UCF	0-16

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	17.2	116
Rushing	107.9	114
Passing	196.8	95
Total	304.7	118
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.0	T-65
Rushing	182.9	83
Passing	219.8	51
Total	402.8	69
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 0	+ 0.0	T-59

TULANE | GREEN WAVE

AAC rank: 9 | Record: 3-9 | AAC record: 2-6 (T-8th) | Stadium: Yulman (30,000)

RANKING 102

GREEN WAVE at a GLANCE

LOCATION: New Orleans
COACH: Curtis Johnson — At Tulane and overall: 12-25, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Eric Price
DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Lionel Washington, Jason Rollins

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1998, Conference USA
LAST BOWL: 2013, New Orleans
RETURNING STARTERS: 16; 9 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Tanner Lee, RB Sherman Badie, C Nathan Shienle, DE Royce LaFrance, LB Nico Marley, NB Jarrod Franklin, CB Parry Nickerson, S Darion Monroe

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Badie has breakaway speed and scored on several long runs last season, including one of 90. He combos with power runner Lazedrick Thompson for a one-two punch behind an experienced line. The Green Wave's secondary is the most talented unit on the team despite losing two key players (one to graduation and one to the NFL Draft).

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: QB Tanner Lee threw more interceptions last season (14) than touchdowns (12). Without the threat of a passing game, Tulane will be facing loaded boxes and an uphill battle for first downs and touchdowns.

SHERMAN BADIE
Photo by Dennis Hubbard

OFFENSE

The Green Wave's rushing offense made big gains in 2014. It finished with 145.5 yards per game and climbed out of the very bottom of the NCAA statistics to rank 91st in the category.

What didn't improve was the passing game and scoring.

The key players haven't changed — so it's up to the same old guys to try to improve upon the results. Quarterback Tanner Lee will have to be more effective and throw more touchdown passes than interceptions this time around. Last season, he had 12 scoring passes and was picked off 14 times.

Coach Curtis Johnson insists that an improved offense with more tight end packages will take some pressure off Lee and allow the passing game to come along.

Sherman Badie will lead the running game. He rushed 121 times for a team-best 688 yards last season, despite being slowed near the end by an ankle injury. Tight end Charles Jones II, who had 21 catches as a true freshman last season, will have a bigger role.

DEFENSE

Tulane's secondary has been its calling card in the past few years.

Cornerback Parry Nickerson made six interceptions in his debut as a redshirt freshman. He returns, although 2014 counterpart Lorenzo Doss declared early for the NFL Draft. Richard Allen, a seldom-used junior, will replace Doss and create some intrigue in the defensive backfield.

Tulane returns a strong player in senior safety Darion Monroe, but lost defensive signal-caller Sam Scofield to graduation. Monroe had 73 tackles last season and will be joined by Leonard Davis, who platooned some in 2014 but will be the every-game starter at strong safety in 2015.

Nickel back Jarrod Franklin was a big playmaker before going down with a knee injury a year ago. He returned this spring to much fanfare in practice. Defensive end Royce LaFrance and linebacker Nico Marley are proven starters at their positions and should mentor less-experienced players in their units this fall.

"We are moving the ball pretty good — I know how much they struggled last year."
— Coach Curtis Johnson.

SPECIAL TEAMS

This remains Tulane's biggest headache. In his freshman season, Andrew DiRocco made only 8 of 15 field-goal attempts, missed two extra points and even committed a false-start penalty on a PAT. He was 6 of 11 from between 20 and 39 yards.

DiRocco did stabilize as the season went on, but he didn't have a good spring. Expect a hot fall camp competition for the place-kicking job between DiRocco, baseball player walk-on Trevor Simms and incoming freshman Zachary Block.

OVERVIEW

The team returns for its second season in the American Athletic Conference, hoping to excel in the league's new 12-team, two-division format. The Green Wave lost some momentum with fans after a losing season in its first year in the $73 million-plus Yulman Stadium in 2014. Tulane will have to see vast improvement on offense to have hopes of returning to a bowl.

TOP NEWCOMER

K Zachary Block: Coach Curtis Johnson wasn't happy with either incumbent kicker in spring. That gives Block a chance to make a big impact. The goal: Just consistently make field goals inside of 40 yards.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	12	**Tanner Lee***	6-4	220	So.
FB	33	Lazedrick Thompson	6-1	217	Jr.
RB	3	**Sherman Badie***	6-0	195	So.
WR	19	**Terren Encalade***	6-0	185	So.
WR	9	**Teddy Veal***	5-11	185	So.
TE	84	**Charles Jones II***	6-3	235	So.
LT	68	**Arturo Uzdavinis***	6-7	300	Sr.
LG	61	**Colton Hanson***	6-5	315	Jr.
C	66	**Nathan Shienle***	6-5	300	Jr.
RG	75	**Chris Taylor***	6-2	310	Jr.
RT	79	Kenneth Santa Marina	6-6	305	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	48	**Royce LaFrance***	6-4	265	Sr.
DT	77	**Tanzel Smart***	6-1	303	Jr.
DT	94	**Sean Wilson***	6-4	265	So.
DE	92	Daren Williams	6-4	235	So.
NB	34	Jarrod Franklin	5-11	196	So.
LB	52	Eric Thomas	5-10	227	Jr.
LB	20	**Nico Marley***	5-9	200	Jr.
CB	17	**Parry Nickerson***	5-11	179	So.
CB	23	Richard Allen	5-9	178	Jr.
S	2	**Darion Monroe***	5-11	197	Sr.
S	10	Leonard Davis	6-0	198	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	28	**Andrew DiRocco***	6-1	180	So.
P	31	**Peter Picerelli***	6-1	190	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	DUKE
Sept. 12	at Georgia Tech
Sept. 19	MAINE
Oct. 3	UCF
Oct. 10	at Temple
Oct. 16	HOUSTON
Oct. 24	at Navy
Oct. 31	at Memphis
Nov. 7	CONNECTICUT
Nov. 14	at Army
Nov. 21	at SMU
Nov. 28	TULSA

2014 RESULTS

L	at Tulsa	31-38 (2 OT)
L	GEORGIA TECH	21-38
W	SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA	35-20
L	at Duke	13-47
L	at Rutgers	6-31
W	CONNECTICUT	12-3
L	at UCF	13-20
L	CINCINNATI	14-38
W	at Houston	31-24
L	MEMPHIS	7-38
L	at East Carolina	6-34
L	TEMPLE	3-10

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	16.0	121
Rushing	145.5	91
Passing	201.3	85
Total	346.8	107
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	28.4	79
Rushing	157.9	50
Passing	229.9	67
Total	387.8	55
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+3	+.25	T-45

CONNECTICUT | HUSKIES

AAC rank: 10 Record: 2-10 AAC record: 1-7 (T-10th) Stadium: Rentschler Field (40,000)

RANKING 111

HUSKIES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Storrs, Conn.
COACH: Bob Diaco — At UConn and overall: 2-10, 1 year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Frank Verducci
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Vincent Brown

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2010, Big East, co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2010, Fiesta
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 5 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Bryant Shirreffs, RB Arkeel Newsome, RB Ron Johnson, LB Marquise Vann, LB Junior Joseph, FS Andrew Adams

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The defense will be strong through the middle. It starts with the defensive line and linebackers, and there is depth throughout. The Huskies have experience at quarterback and a pair of capable running backs.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Quarterback play remains an uncertainty, and the issue is that everything flows from there. Whether it is Shirreffs or Tim Boyle, the quarterback has to play well. The offensive line was shifted around, so it must jell. Losing the top-two receivers is also a potential offensive pitfall.

OFFENSE

Bob Diaco is best known as a defensive coach, but the focus heading into his second year of a rebuilding job needs to be on the other side of the ball.

In the world of video game offenses, the Huskies managed a dismal 15.5 points per game last season, and the offense produced just 20 touchdowns.

Quarterback Tim Boyle, last season's backup, will try to win the job, but NC State transfer Bryant Shirreffs had the best spring and is in prime position to take over a lackluster offense. Whether new coordinator Frank Verducci can work some magic could be key as well.

The Huskies have a nice running back tandem in Arkeel Newsome and Ron Johnson, but a re-shaped line will have to show it can open running lanes. UConn also needs to replace top receiver Geremy Davis, who left for the NFL. Throw in the fact that DeShon Foxx is also gone, and it will be time for the young guys to step in.

DEFENSE

Connecticut will be formidable in the middle, especially against the run, because of a mix of experience, talent, size and depth. Julian Campenni and Kenton Adeyemi will be a force, and the depth goes a long way as the Huskies will be able to rotate as many as nine on the defensive line.

The linebacker corps is also impressive, and experienced. Marquise Vann and Graham Stewart combined to make 199 tackles, and Junior Joseph will move into a bigger role. There is also depth with Vontae Diggs and Luke Carrezola, but a sleeper to look for is converted fullback Matt Walsh, who was built to play linebacker.

While the Hukies have plenty of depth and talent in the secondary, there is one key member no longer there. Cornerback Byron Jones jumped to the NFL, which means Jamar Summers is about to get a lot of action from opposing quarterbacks until he shows he can handle it.

The Huskies are strong with Andrew Adams and Obi Melifonwu at the safety spots, while Jhavon Williams is a proven cornerback.

GRAHAM STEWART
Photo by Tomasso DeRosa

"They are not a big collection of numbers of guys, but right now they have definitely flipped a switch."

— Bob Diaco, on his senior class

SPECIAL TEAMS

Justin Wain averaged 38.8 yards per punt, and that needs to improve, but of his 74 punts, 30 were fair caught and 17 were downed inside the 20, which means the coverage worked. Bobby Puyol needs to improve his place-kicking — he was 19 of 22 on extra point attempts. He was 9 of 14 on field goal tries.

OVERVIEW

Year Two needs to be better under Diaco, and it should be. The players know his style; he understands the personnel and he has more options at quarterback. The Huskies should be fine on defense, but they will need to score. Is a bowl game possible? Well, with three of the first four at home against Villanova, Army and Navy, some momentum could build.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB William Richardson: The true freshman flew under the radar of many schools, but he runs well and is physical. He can get to the sideline in the running game, but he is at his best playing downhill toward the line of scrimmage. He made 15 sacks and recovered four fumbles as a senior at Washington (D.C.) Ballou High.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	4	Bryant Shirreffs	6-1	216	So.
RB	3	Ron Johnson	5-11	220	So.
FB	34	Jazzmar Clax	5-11	249	Jr.
WR	5	Noel Thomas	6-1	193	Jr.
WR	1	Dhameer Bradley	5-10	173	Jr.
TE	**49**	**Sean McQuillan***	**6-3**	**247**	**Sr.**
LT	**71**	**Richard Levy***	**6-6**	**308**	**Jr.**
LG	62	Tommy Hopkins	6-6	308	So.
C	**63**	**Ryan Crozier***	**6-4**	**294**	**So.**
RG	**60**	**Tyler Samra***	**6-2**	**290**	**Sr.**
RT	**53**	**Andreas Knappe***	**6-8**	**310**	**Jr.**
DEFENSE					
DE	**95**	**Kenton Adeyemi***	**6-4**	**287**	**Sr.**
NT	**90**	**Julian Campenni***	**6-0**	**302**	**Sr.**
DT	93	Folorunso Fatukasi	6-4	298	So.
DE	57	Cole Ormsby	6-3	257	So.
LB	**46**	**Marquise Vann***	**6-0**	**226**	**Sr.**
LB	11	Junior Joseph	6-1	242	So.
LB	**2**	**Graham Stewart***	**6-1**	**228**	**Sr.**
CB	**6**	**Jhavon Williams***	**5-10**	**194**	**Jr.**
CB	21	Jamar Summers	6-0	177	So.
SS	**20**	**Obi Melifonwu***	**6-3**	**214**	**Jr.**
FS	**22**	**Andrew Adams***	**6-0**	**197**	**Sr.**
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	**17**	**Bobby Puyol***	**5-10**	**173**	**Jr.**
P	**42**	**Justin Wain***	**6-3**	**209**	**Jr.**

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	VILLANOVA
Sept. 12	ARMY
Sept. 19	at Missouri
Sept. 26	NAVY
Oct. 2	at BYU
Oct. 10	at UCF
Oct. 17	SOUTH FLORIDA
Oct. 24	at Cincinnati
Oct. 30	EAST CAROLINA
Nov. 7	at Tulane
Nov. 21	HOUSTON
Nov. 28	at Temple

2014 RESULTS

L	BYU	10-35
W	STONY BROOK	19-16
L	BOISE STATE	21-38
L	at South Florida	14-17
L	TEMPLE	10-36
L	at Tulane	3-12
L	at East Carolina	21-31
W	UCF	37-29
L	ARMY	21-35
L	CINCINNATI	0-41
L	at Memphis	10-41
L	SMU	20-27

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	15.5	122
Rushing	106.9	116
Passing	169.3	111
Total	276.2	123
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	29.8	T-84
Rushing	169.8	69
Passing	208.8	36
Total	378.6	49
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 13	- 1.08	T-116

SMU | MUSTANGS

AAC rank: 11 Record: 1-11 AAC record: 1-7 (T-10th) Stadium: Gerald J. Ford Stadium (32,000)

RANKING 112

MUSTANGS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Dallas, Texas
COACH: Chad Morris — At SMU and overall: 1st year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Joe Craddock
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Van Malone

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1984, Southwest Conference co-champions
LAST BOWL: 2012, Hawaii
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 7 offense, 5 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Matt Davis, RB Prescott Line, WR Darius Joseph, WR Courtland Sutton, DT Zach Wood, LB Jonathan Yenga, FS Darrion Richardson

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The best thing SMU has going is the energy Morris injected into the program. An established former high school coach in the state, Morris should be able to stock the Mustangs with better talent than they've had since before the death penalty in the 1980s. Until then, SMU at least has potential playmakers on offense.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Teams pushed SMU around on the offensive and defensive lines last season, and there's no quick fix for that. The defense isn't likely to make a vast improvement this season, so the offensive line has to get a lot better — and quickly — for the Mustangs to outscore opponents.

DEION SANDERS, JR.
Photo by Jeff Goldberg

OFFENSE

New SMU coach Chad Morris will look to junior Matt Davis to run the up-tempo spread offense that Morris had great success with as Clemson's coordinator.

Although none of the SMU quarterbacks was effective last season, Davis at least has a baseline of experience, having completed 89 of 164 passes for 855 yards in 2014. The bad news is Davis connected for just three touchdown passes, and he was intercepted five times. Davis led SMU with 613 rushing yards (5.7 per carry).

The Mustangs have experienced playmakers in running back Prescott Line and 2014 leading receiver Darius Joseph. But they'll also be counting on newcomers, especially redshirt freshman Courtland Sutton, who had an outstanding spring. SMU's brightest spot in recruiting was at wide receiver, and the Mustangs will likely look to deploy those players in a hurry.

SMU had a porous offensive line, allowing a national-worst 48 sacks. The Mustangs do return four starters, hoping for natural improvement.

DEFENSE

SMU's defense ranked near the bottom of the national stats, finishing 119th in total defense, allowing 499.4 yards per game. There's some good news as plenty of impact players from that group return, especially in the secondary.

Safety Darrion Richardson made 44 solo and 25 assisted tackles, including three for loss. He's one of three returning starters in the secondary, joined by cornerbacks Horace Richardson (no relation) and Jesse Montgomery.

Up the middle, defensive tackle Zach Wood totaled six tackles for loss, including four sacks among his 40 total tackles. Linebacker Jonathan Yenga was fourth on the Mustangs last season with 65 total tackles, including 4.5 for loss.

Morris said going into the spring game that the SMU defense was still adapting to the up-tempo style. Although the fast pace will start on the offensive side, the defense has to be prepared for the demands that the hurry-up style creates.

"I really think this is a team that we're sitting here in December, getting ready to play in a bowl game."
— Chad Morris, on SMU's goals

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Jackson Koonce got plenty of work last season, averaging 40.8 yards on 74 attempts. SMU will turn place-kicking duties over to redshirt freshman Michael Armstrong.

SMU's biggest name in the kicking game is Deion Sanders Jr., who led the Mustangs in kick-return yardage last season. However, at 20.5 yards per return, Sanders name was way ahead of his impact in 2014.

OVERVIEW

Morris said in the spring that the goal this season is to get to a bowl game, which would be a huge step forward for a team that floundered quickly last season and finished 1-11. SMU is only three seasons removed from its last bowl win, a 43-10 triumph over Fresno State in the 2012 Hawaii Bowl, so it's not as if the program itself is in horrible shape. Morris will have to rebuild from the ground up, but chances are good he can do that, given his offensive wizardry and his ties to the state as a former Texas high school coach.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Kevin Thomas: The 6-2 freshman from DeSoto (Texas) High School had offers from several Power 5 conference teams, and originally committed to Kansas. The 3-star recruit has the look of a potential big-play receiver in SMU's offense.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	4	**Matt Davis***	6-0	209	Jr.
RB	42	**Prescott Line***	6-0	228	Jr.
WR	16	Courtland Sutton	6-4	215	Fr.
WR	18	**Darius Joseph***	5-11	202	Sr.
WR	13	Ryheem Malone	5-8	172	So.
TE	84	Jeremiah Gaines	6-2	240	Jr.
LT	71	**Chauncey Briggs***	6-6	310	Jr.
LG	67	**Daniel McCarty***	6-3	284	Jr.
C	52	**Taylor Lasecki***	6-2	294	Sr.
RG	58	Taylor Reich	6-6	308	Sr.
RT	75	**Kris Weeks***	6-5	314	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	95	Andrew McCleneghen	6-5	265	Sr.
NT	93	Mason Gentry	6-6	292	So.
DT	90	**Zach Wood***	6-3	260	Sr.
DE	99	Justin Lawler	6-3	254	So.
LB	28	Shakiel Randolph	6-4	216	Sr.
LB	48	Anthony Rhone	6-0	225	So.
LB	1	**Jonathan Yenga***	6-1	220	Sr.
CB	9	**Horace Richardson***	6-0	202	Jr.
CB	4	**Jesse Montgomery***	6-0	180	So.
SS	26	Troy Castle	5-11	205	Sr.
FS	29	**Darrion Richardson***	6-0	203	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	38	Michael Armstrong	5-10	167	Fr.
P	35	**Jackson Koonce***	6-1	170	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	BAYLOR
Sept. 12	NORTH TEXAS
Sept. 19	at TCU
Sept. 26	JAMES MADISON
Oct. 3	EAST CAROLINA
Oct. 8	at Houston
Oct. 24	at South Florida
Oct. 31	TULSA
Nov. 6	TEMPLE
Nov. 14	at Navy
Nov. 21	TULANE
Nov. 28	at Memphis

2014 RESULTS

L	at Baylor	0-45
L	at North Texas	6-43
L	TEXAS A&M	6-58
L	TCU	0-56
L	at East Carolina	24-45
L	CINCINNATI	3-41
L	MEMPHIS	10-48
L	at Tulsa	28-38
L	SOUTH FLORIDA	13-14
L	at UCF	7-53
L	HOUSTON	9-35
W	at Connecticut	27-20

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	11.1	125
Rushing	100.3	118
Passing	168.7	112
Total	269.0	124
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	41.3	124
Rushing	235.8	114
Passing	263.7	106
Total	499.4	119
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 14	- 1.17	120

TULSA | GOLDEN HURRICANE

AAC rank: 12 Record: 2-10 AAC rank: 2-6 (T-8th) Stadium: H.A. Chapman Stadium (30,000)

RANKING 114

GOLDEN HURRICANE at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Tulsa, Okla.
COACH: Philip Montgomery — At Tulsa and overall: 1st year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Sterlin Gilbert, Matt Mattox
DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Brian Norwood, Bill Young

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2005
LAST BOWL: 2012, Liberty
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 8 offense, 5 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Dane Evans, WR Keevan Lucas, WR Keyarris Garrett, WR Josh Atkinson, DE Derrick Alexander, LB Craig Suits, S Michael Mudoh

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Evans leads an experienced offense that should be well-equipped to adapt to Montgomery's system. Expect Tulsa to move the football and, if Montgomery's tenure at Baylor is an indication, do so with a balanced attack.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Hurricane's defense was dominated up front last season, and that weakness doesn't match up well with the incoming staff's strengths. Tulsa doesn't figure to have a stingy defense in 2015, either, but some key returners might help the unit get off the field enough to give Tulsa's offense more chances to win.

OFFENSE

New Tulsa coach Philip Montgomery coached with Art Briles at the high school level in Stephenville, Texas, then at Houston and Baylor. Naturally, Montgomery is implementing the same concepts that helped Baylor rise to college football's offensive elite.

That means putting the ball in the air a lot, especially with vertical routes, but also balancing the aerial assault with a strong running game.

The good news for Montgomery: There are players in place to make the system go at Tulsa. Junior quarterback Dane Evans started all 12 games last season, passing for 3,102 yards and 23 touchdowns, although 17 interceptions took the luster off his success.

Tulsa returns its top three receivers, including Evans' favorite target, Keevan Lucas, who caught 101 passes for 1,219 yards and 11 touchdowns last season. Keyarris Garrett snagged 47 passes with a 14.9-per-catch average, and Josh Atkinson hauled in 35 receptions in 2014.

The prospects are almost as good up front, with four offensive line starters back for the Golden Hurricane.

D'Angelo Brewer came out of the spring as the starter at running back. However, if Montgomery continues the trend he set at Baylor, Tulsa will deploy a backfield by committee. Redshirt freshmen Ramadi Warren and Tavarreon Dickerson are the most likely candidates to share carries with Brewer.

DEFENSE

Tulsa gave up 486.8 yards per game and ranked 114th nationally in total defense last season. And the new coaching staff doesn't exactly come from a place known for a stingy defense.

However, there are reasons to believe Tulsa could be better on defense, and that starts with returning safety Michael Mudoh. He led the Hurricane with 113 tackles and two interceptions in 2014.

The No. 2 tackler, linebacker Craig Suits, is back after posting 81 total tackles, including 7.5 for loss.

Up front, Tulsa has three returning starters, most notably defensive end Jeremy Smith, who played in all 12 games. That group combined for 26.5 tackles for loss, including 13.5 sacks.

But the Hurricane must get better at the point of attack against the running game. Tulsa gave up 5.5 yards per carry and 214.7 yards rushing per game in 2014.

DANE EVANS
Photo by Dennis Hubbard

"Momentum is the best player on the field, so if we can capture it early and hold on to it, good things can happen."
— Philip Montgomery

SPECIAL TEAMS

Walk-on Redford Jones takes over the kicking duties. He lacks collegiate experience but showed a consistent leg in high school. Returning punter Dalton Parks averaged 42.0 yards per attempt last season and stuck 20 punts inside the opponent's 20-yard line.

OVERVIEW

On paper, there's a lot for Montgomery and the new coaching staff to like about the players returning in 2015. That is, if they ignore Tulsa's 2-10 record in 2014. Montgomery is viewed as an offensive guru, but a lack of offense wasn't the Hurricane's problem last season. Tulsa needs to make strides on defense and figure out how to win the close ones.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Chad President: Originally committed to Baylor, President switched his pledge when Philip Montgomery took the job at Tulsa. Once upon a time, Montgomery and Briles used the same offensive formula to build Baylor's system around Robert Griffin III.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	9	Dane Evans*	6-1	218	Jr.
RB	4	D'Angelo Brewer*	5-9	185	So.
WR	1	Keyarris Garrett*	6-4	221	Sr.
WR	80	Conner Floyd	6-0	210	Sr.
WR	2	Keevan Lucas*	5-10	198	Jr.
WR	88	Josh Atkinson	6-2	208	Jr.
LT	66	Evan Plagg	6-4	279	So.
LG	76	Garrett Stafford*	6-5	314	Sr.
C	57	Dylan Foxworth*	6-1	285	Jr.
RG	63	Chris Wallace*	6-5	311	Jr.
RT	78	Blake Belcher*	6-5	300	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	54	Derrick Alexander*	6-2	284	Sr.
NT	70	Jerry Uwaezuoke*	6-3	295	Jr.
DT	99	Derrick Luetjen*	6-3	291	Sr.
DE	98	Jeremy Smith	6-5	248	So.
LB	38	Matt Linscott	6-1	212	Jr.
LB	40	Trent Martin	6-2	235	So.
LB	28	Craig Suits*	6-0	220	So.
CB	2	Kerwin Thomas	5-10	171	So.
CB	6	Darrell Williams	5-10	197	Sr.
S	1	Michael Mudoh*	5-10	205	Sr.
S	13	Jordan Mitchell	6-2	180	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	19	Redford Jones	5-10	174	So.
P	26	Dalton Parks*	6-3	209	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	FAU
Sept. 12	at New Mexico
Sept. 19	at Oklahoma
Oct. 3	HOUSTON
Oct. 10	ULM
Oct. 17	at East Carolina
Oct. 23	MEMPHIS
Oct. 31	at SMU
Nov. 7	UCF
Nov. 14	at Cincinnati
Nov. 21	NAVY
Nov. 28	at Tulane

2014 RESULTS

W	TULANE (2OT)	38-31
L	OKLAHOMA	7-52
L	at FAU	21-50
L	TEXAS STATE (3OT)	34-37
L	at Colorado State	17-42
L	at Temple	24-35
L	SOUTH FLORIDA	30-38
L	at Memphis	20-40
W	SMU	38-28
L	at UCF	7-31
L	at Houston	28-38
L	EAST CAROLINA	32-49

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	24.5	91
Rushing	147.8	87
Passing	264.7	36
Total	412.5	56
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	39.3	119
Rushing	214.7	108
Passing	272.1	113
Total	486.8	114
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 8	- .83	111

PICKING THE ACC

Talented Tigers Have the Horses to Dethrone Florida State

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney says quarterback Deshaun Watson's rehabilitation from knee surgery is "way ahead of schedule."

Watson, a sophomore star-in-the-making, says he'll be ready for the Tigers' first game on Sept. 5. After what he was able to do in his first year with the Tigers, it's probably a smart bet to trust him.

Clemson will need a healthy Watson to wrest control of the ACC from Florida State, which despite another round of major personnel losses to the NFL, will be neck-and-neck with the Tigers in the conference race.

Georgia Tech and Virginia Tech figure to have the best shot from the Coastal Division side. But Clemson has something special in Watson.

The 6-2, 205-pound sophomore from Gainesville, Ga., threw for 14 touchdowns and ran for five in a limited role last season. He has the potential to be the difference in a tight ACC race, if he's healthy.

Watson is already somewhat of a folk hero in football-mad Tigertown. He accounted for four touchdowns in Clemson's 35-17 win over rival South Carolina, despite playing with a torn ACL in his left knee.

He had surgery in December to repair the knee and did not practice in the spring but was able to jog and throw passes. He was able to work on what Swinney called "mental reps," which should help come the fall.

"I just expect to have him take it to another level from a mental standpoint," Swinney said.

Watson's physical gifts were evident when he was healthy last season. A strong-armed passer and a nimble rusher, he can do a little bit of everything. He nearly led the Tigers to an upset at Florida State, completing 19 of 28 passes for 266 yards and rushing for a touchdown in a 23-17 overtime loss in his first extensive college action.

In his first college start, he threw for 435 yards and six touchdowns in a 50-35 rout of North Carolina. He followed up with 267 passing yards, two passing touchdowns and two rushing touchdowns in a 41-0 romp over NC State.

But Watson broke a finger on his throwing hand in his next start and missed three games. He returned briefly in a 28-6 loss at Georgia Tech, but hurt his knee. Then he did more damage to the knee the following week in practice. He played against South Carolina anyway and led the Tigers to their first win over the Gamecocks in six years.

The talented quarterback will have

CONFERENCE PICKS

ATLANTIC DIV.	Good news	Bad news	Our call
1. Clemson	Main weapons return, including a pair of dynamic WRs (Mike Williams, Artavis Scott).	Tigers have to replace eight starters from the country's top defense.	We'll just say Deshaun Watson is healthy and the Tigers will nose FSU in a tight race.
2. Florida State	RB Dalvin Cook, S Jalen Ramsey are two of the best players in the country.	The talent drain includes 11 players who were drafted.	Even great programs have to take a half-step back every once in a while..
3. NC State	Senior QB Jacoby Brissett is back, so are eight starters on an improving defense.	The offense needs two new tackles; the defensive line has holes to fill.	Brissett helps the Wolfpack take another step forward from last year's 8-5 finish.
4. Louisville	There's a handful of talented transfers waiting in the wings, led by DE Devonte Fields.	A boatload of talent (10 draft picks) left for the NFL.	The retooled Cards will have to stay healthy to post another 8- or 9-win season.
5. Boston College	No one was able to lure away coach Steve Addazio.	QB Tyler Murphy and all five starters on the offensive line have to be replaced.	Addazio does more with less; he'll find a way to get the Eagles to a third straight bowl.
6. Syracuse	The lousy, injury-filled 2014 season is over.	The defense, which was strong during said misery, needs nine new starters.	Scott Shafer is in rebuilding mode, which equals another bowl season at home.
7. Wake Forest	QB John Wolford's a year older; LB Brandon Chubb, S Ryan Janvion back on defense.	Top-notch corner Kevin Johnson is in the NFL.	There's no shortcut for second-year coach Dave Clawson. He needs more time.
COASTAL DIV.			
1. Georgia Tech	QB Justin Thomas is a wizard in Paul Johnson's option offense.	The top four running backs are not.	The Jackets cross over against FSU and Clemson. No margin of error this season.
2. Virginia Tech	The defensive line is the best in the ACC.	There's still question marks about the offense and the health of RB Marshawn Williams.	Tech, by virtue of the best draw and best defense, could certainly win its first division title since 2011.
3. North Carolina	All the major parts from the ACC's third-best scoring offense return.	The defense got a new coach (Gene Chizik), but needs a talent upgrade.	With just a little defensive improvement, the Tar Heels will win eight or nine games.
4. Duke	All-ACC LB Kelby Brown and TE Braxton Deaver are back after missing 2014.	All-ACC WR Jamison Crowder and OT Laken Tomlinson are in the NFL.	The Blue Devils will factor in the division race and win eight or nine games.
5. Pittsburgh	RB James Conner (1,765 yards), WR Tyler Boyd (1,261 yards) are a great pair.	Another coaching change slows any momentum from the previous two years.	Panthers slept through their "sleeper" potential last year. There's talent to surprise, but no consistency.
6. Miami	QB Brad Kaaya (3,198 yards) turned out to be a gem as a first-year starter.	RB Duke Johnson, WR Phillip Dorsett, OT Ereck Flowers aren't around to help Kaaya.	Canes completely underachieved last season, will struggle without the talent it lost to the NFL.
7. Virginia	Oregon and Florida State are off the schedule.	There still aren't many breaks on the new schedule.	Working through QB issues, the Cavaliers would be a bowl team with an easier schedule.

help. Sophomore running back Wayne Gallman will be a year better and there isn't a better pair of receivers in the ACC than Artavis Scott and Mike Williams.

Swinney's confident he has recruited well enough to reload on defense and hold off FSU, which has won 24 straight ACC games and three straight conference titles.

"Last year, we were just so experienced and our second team was as good as our first team (on defense)," Swinney said. "Whereas this year, our first group is really, really good."

They will need to be. FSU loses quarterback Jameis Winston, the No. 1 overall pick in the NFL Draft, but dynamic running back Dalvin Cook will make the transition a lot easier for, presumably, Sean Maguire.

The Nov. 7 meeting at Clemson will likely determine the Atlantic division race, while the Georgia Tech-Virginia Tech winner on Nov. 12 might be the difference in another tight Coastal Division scrum.

— Joe Giglio

HONOR ROLL

Most accurate passer	Brad Kaaya	Miami
Strongest arm	Deshaun Watson	Clemson
Best scrambler	Marquise Williams	North Carolina
Coolest in the clutch	Justin Thomas	Georgia Tech
Toughest to bring down	James Conner	Pitt
Best hands	Artavis Scott	Clemson
Most dangerous deep threat	Tyler Boyd	Pitt
Best pass blocker	Landon Turner	North Carolina
Best run blocker	Bryan Chamberlain	Georgia Tech
Best cover corner	Kendall Fuller	Virginia Tech
Best pass rusher	Ken Ekanem	Virginia Tech
Special teams demon	Tyler Boyd	Pitt

Most Valuable Player

Deshaun Watson, QB, Clemson

Offensive Player of the Year

Justin Thomas, QB, Georgia Tech

Defensive Player of the Year

Jalen Ramsey, S, Florida State

Newcomer of the Year

Devonte Fields, DE, Louisville

Lindy's ALL-ACC TEAM

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Deshaun Watson	So.	Clemson
RB	Dalvin Cook	So.	Florida State
RB	James Conner	Jr.	Pittsburgh
WR	Tyler Boyd	Jr.	Pittsburgh
WR	Mike Williams	Jr.	Clemson
TE	Braxton Deaver	Sr.	Duke
C	Matt Skura	Sr.	Duke
OL	Bryan Chamberlain	Sr.	Georgia Tech
OL	Landon Turner	Sr.	North Carolina
OL	Roderick Johnson	So.	Florida State
OL	Wyatt Teller	So.	Virginia Tech
AP	Ryan Switzer	Jr.	North Carolina
K	Roberto Aguayo	Jr.	Florida State

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DE	Dadi Nicolas	Sr.	Virginia Tech
DT	Adam Gotsis	Sr.	Georgia Tech
DT	Luther Maddy	Sr.	Virginia Tech
DE	Shaq Lawson	Jr.	Clemson
LB	Kelby Brown	Sr.	Duke
LB	James Burgess	Sr.	Louisville
LB	Terrance Smith	Sr.	Florida State
DB	Jalen Ramsey	Jr.	Florida State
DB	Jeremy Cash	Sr.	Duke
DB	Kendall Fuller	Jr.	Virginia Tech
DB	DeVon Edwards	Jr.	Duke
P	Alex Kinal	Sr.	Wake Forest

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Justin Thomas	Jr.	Georgia Tech
RB	Jon Hilliman	So.	Boston College
RB	Wayne Gallman	So.	Clemson
WR	Artavis Scott	So.	Clemson
WR	Travis Rudolph	So.	Florida State
TE	Bucky Hodges	So.	Virginia Tech
C	Ryan Norton	Sr.	Clemson
OL	Kareem Are	Jr.	Florida State
OL	Errin Joe	Sr.	Georgia Tech
OL	Joe Thuney	Sr.	NC State
OL	Jonathan McLaughlin	Jr.	Virginia Tech
AP	Matt Dayes	Jr.	NC State
K	Ross Martin	Sr.	Duke

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DE	Sheldon Rankins	Sr.	Louisville
DT	Connor Wujciak	Sr.	Boston College
DT	Derrick Nnadi	So.	Florida State
DE	Ken Ekanem	Jr.	Virginia Tech
LB	Reggie Northrup	Sr.	Florida State
LB	P.J. Davis	Jr.	Georgia Tech
LB	Brandon Chubb	Sr.	Wake Forest
DB	Jamal Golden	Sr.	Georgia Tech
DB	Quin Blanding	So.	Virginia
DB	Nate Andrews	Jr.	Florida State
DB	MacKensie Alexander	So.	Clemson
P	Will Monday	Sr.	Duke

OFFENSE - THIRD TEAM

QB	Marquise Williams	Sr.	North Carolina
RB	Brandon Radcliff	Jr.	Louisville
RB	Shadrach Thornton	Sr.	NC State
WR	Isaiah Ford	So.	Virginia Tech
WR	Jesus Wilson	Jr.	Florida State
TE	Cam Serigne	So.	Wake Forest
C	Freddie Burden	Jr.	Georgia Tech
OL	Dorian Johnson	Jr.	Pittsburgh
OL	Trey Braun	Sr.	Georgia Tech
OL	Rob Trudo	Sr.	Syracuse
OL	Isaiah Battle	Sr.	Clemson
AP	Smoke Mizzell	Jr.	Virginia
K	Ian Frye	Sr.	Virginia

DEFENSE - THIRD TEAM

DE	Devonte Fields	Jr.	Louisville
DT	Derrick Mitchell	Sr.	Florida State
DT	Carlos Watkins	Jr.	Clemson
DE	Mike Rose	Sr.	NC State
LB	Deon Clarke	Sr.	Virginia Tech
LB	Keith Kelsey	Jr.	Louisville
LB	Steven Daniels	Sr.	Boston College
DB	Maurice Canady	Sr.	Virginia
DB	Deon Bush	Sr.	Miami
DB	Lafayette Pitts	Jr.	Pittsburgh
DB	Ryan Janvion	Jr.	Wake Forest
P	Justin Vogel	Jr.	Miami

THE BIG ONES

Sept. 3 North Carolina vs. South Carolina (Charlotte)	Steve Spurrier looks to remain perfect (5-0) against the Tar Heels.
Sept. 5 Auburn vs. Louisville (Atlanta)	Louisville's three SEC transfers get a familiar foe in the Tigers.
Sept. 7 Ohio State at Virginia Tech	Only one team beat the national champions last year.
Sept. 17 Clemson at Louisville	Third game for the Tigers, first real test for Deshaun Watson's knee.
Sept. 18 Florida State at Boston College	Even with Jameis Winston, the Noles struggled with the Eagles.
Sept. 19 Nebraska at Miami	Canes lost a 41-31 shootout in Lincoln last year.
Sept. 26 Virginia Tech at East Carolina	The Pirates have won four straight over ACC foes.
Oct. 3 Notre Dame at Clemson	First meeting of football powers since 1979.
Oct. 9 NC State at Virginia Tech	Friday night fun between the Wolfpack O and the Hokies' D.
Oct. 10 Georgia Tech at Clemson Miami at Florida State	It's almost always a close game when these two get together. ACC needs more drama from these two, just like last year's game.
Oct. 17 Louisville at Florida State Virginia Tech at Miami	FSU's 42-31 comeback in '14 featured 21 draft picks between the teams. The Canes have won two of the past three in dominant fashion.
Oct. 24 Clemson at Miami Florida State at Georgia Tech	Just fifth meeting since Miami joined ACC in '04, first since '10. Rematch of 2014 and 2012 ACC title games.
Oct. 31 Clemson at NC State	Tigers' last division loss, to a team other than FSU, was in Raleigh in 2011.
Nov. 7 Florida State at Clemson Duke at North Carolina	Division title figures to be at stake, Noles have won 4 of 5 in series. UNC cost Duke a division title with last year's 45-20 blowout in Durham.
Nov. 12 Virginia Tech at Georgia Tech	The Hokies (20-9) have been a tough out on Thursday nights.
Nov. 14 NC State at Florida State	'Noles haven't lost an ACC game since 2012 — 17-16 at NC State.
Nov. 21 Georgia Tech at Miami	The option baffled Miami last year in Paul Johnson's first win over the Canes.
Nov. 28 North Carolina at NC State Georgia at Georgia Tech Clemson at South Carolina Florida State at Florida	The Wolfpack has won six of the last eight against the Tar Heels. Jackets ended five-year losing streak with last year's 30-24 OT win. Tigers ended their five-year losing streak with last year's 35-17 win. Jimbo Fisher's 4-1 vs. the Gators and unbeaten in two trips to the Swamp.

DESHAUN WATSON

Photo by John David Mercer-USA TODAY Sports

BOWL CONNECTIONS

If the ACC champ isn't in the four-team College Football Playoff, it can be selected for the four Big Six bowls outside of the national semifinals. Other league affiliations:

Citrus vs. SEC
Russell Athletic Bowl vs. Big 12
Sun vs. Pac-12
Belk vs. SEC
Music City vs. SEC
Tax Slayer vs. SEC
Pinstripe vs. Big Ten
Military vs. AAC
Independence vs. SEC
Quick Lane vs. Big Ten

*The ACC will split six appearances in the Tax Slayer and Music City bowls with the Big Ten over the next six seasons.
*The ACC has further conditional agreements with the St. Petersburg and Birmingham bowls.

TOP 10 NFL TALENT

1. Jalen Ramsey	DB	Jr.	Florida State	Ability to play all over secondary is huge plus.
2. Kendall Fuller	CB	Jr.	Virginia Tech	Has NFL pedigree and smooth cover skills.
3. Terrance Smith	LB	Sr.	Florida State	Versatile athlete at the linebacker position.
4. Tyler Boyd	WR	Jr.	Pitt	Production, production, production.
5. Nate Andrews	S	Jr.	Florida State	Has been strong in run support.
6. Adam Gotsis	DT	Sr.	Georgia Tech	With size, speed, Aussie has been a recruiting gem.
7. James Conner	RB	Jr.	Pitt	Bowling-ball back reminds some of Eddie Lacy.
8. Luther Maddy	DT	Sr.	Virginia Tech	Only an injury delayed his arrival into the NFL.
9. Landon Turner	OG	Sr.	North Carolina	Rated the No. 2 senior guard available for 2016.
10. Jeremy Cash	S	Sr.	Duke	Experienced playmaker with the appropriate athleticism.

*Only draft-eligible players included.

By Ryan Bartow 247Sports

ACC RECRUITING

FLORIDA STATE: The ACC champs signed a Top 3 class nationally and the best in the ACC, something they almost always do. The Seminoles inked the nation's No. 1 five-star safety Derwin James and the No. 1 five-star defensive end Josh Sweat. They also landed one of the nation's top big backs, Jacques Patrick, a five-star cornerback in Tarvarus McFadden and two of Florida's top wide receivers, George Campbell and Da'Vante Phillips. All of them except McFadden are already on campus as early enrollees.

CLEMSON: The Tigers needed to reload what was the nation's No. 1 defense in 2014. They are starting to restock the defensive line with seven signees up front, including national All-Americans Albert Huggins and Christian Wilkins. Clemson also signed its best offensive line class in the modern era, highlighted by bookend tackles Mitch Hyatt and Jake Fruhmorgen. The Tigers also have two elite playmakers out of Tampa, the No. 1 receiver Deon Cain and four-star athlete Ray-Ray McCloud III. Mark Fields is a big-time cornerback out of metro Charlotte, N.C.

MIAMI: Only eight of the Hurricanes' 22 signees were from America's most loaded talent bin of South Florida, the best being four-star back Mark Walton. Almost a third of the class was offensive line signees. Four-star safety Jaquan Johnson was a U.S. Army All-American.

NORTH CAROLINA: The Tar Heels signed their best offensive line class in recent memory, highlighted by four-star prospects Mason Veal, Tommy Hatton and William Sweet. UNC has an instant-impact pass-rusher with four-star defensive end Jalen Dalton. The Heels also added a big wideout with Juval Mollette (6-4, 190).

VIRGINIA TECH: The Hokies signed what they hope is their quarterback of the future in four-star signee Dwayne Lawson out of Tampa. They also loaded up on the defensive line with pass-rusher Trevon Hill, nose guard Tim Settle, Darius Fulwood, Harry Lewis, Eric Whitehead and Yosuah Nijman, one of the nation's better defensive line classes. The Hokies also added one of the top in-state offensive tackles, Austin Clark, and dipped into North Carolina for four-star cornerback Mook Reynolds, both early enrollees.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE: For the first time ever, the Wolfpack landed four of the top seven recruits in the state of North Carolina. Four-star defensive end Darian Roseboro and four-star all-purpose back Nyheim Hines led the way, both early enrollees and a pair of national recruits. The Wolfpack have their left tackle of the future in four-star prospect Emanuel McGirt, and they also flipped All-American four-star running back Johnny Frasier from Florida State late in the cycle. It was truly a class to remember for the Wolfpack.

LOUISVILLE: James Allen, a four-star recruit on 247Sports, is one of the better backs in Florida and has all-league capabilities. Khane Pass, out of powerhouse program Carver High School (Columbus, Ga.), is a hard-hitting safety and a steal for the Cards. Led by Lamar Thomas, Louisville also dipped into south Florida for four-star dual-threat quarterback Lamar Jackson and big receiver Devante Peete.

GEORGIA TECH: The Yellow Jackets signed a big class with 27. The defensive line class was especially strong, highlighted by Kyle Henderson (Tampa, Fla./Plant) and Anree Saint-Amour (Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett), who both played at powerhouse high school programs.

VIRGINIA: The Cavaliers inked a pair of big inside linebackers in Jahvoni Simmons out of the Tidewater Region and Dominic Sheppard, from Miami, who flipped from Wisconsin late when his recruiter of record, Chris Beatty, was hired by Virginia. Three-star quarterback Nick Johns, out of Washington, D.C., may be the quarterback of the future for the Wahoos.

DUKE: The Blue Devils went across the country to California and landed U.S. Army All-American outside linebacker Ben Humphreys. They also dipped into Cali for three-star big guard Reno Rosene (6-6, 350). The Blue Devils landed a second U.S. Army All-American in TJ Rahming out of metro Atlanta, one of the better slot receivers in the Southeast.

WAKE FOREST:The Demon Deacons were able to flip tight end Bowman Archibald from Miami in the fall. They also stole four-star cornerback Dionte Austin out of Maryland. Keep an eye on big back Rocky Reid, a one-time Tennessee commit, who the Deacons landed late. He put up huge numbers at the prep level.

BOSTON COLLEGE:The Golden Eagles went far and wide to find their defensive linemen, inking Ray Smith out of San Diego and Wyatt Ray from Fort Lauderdale, Fla. They also got two tall, lean, powerful offensive tackles in Anthony Palazzolo and Aaron Monteiro, both New England natives.

PITTSBURGH:Despite a coaching change, the Panthers signed one of the nation's best secondary classes. Malik Henderson, out of south Florida, is already on campus. Jordan Whitehead chose Pitt over Alabama, Penn State and Ohio State, and could be one of the best players on the team in the years to come. Add those two with local safeties Dane Jackson and Jay Stocker and the Panthers are stocked on the back end.

SYRACUSE:The Orange landed a very good four-star athlete out of Jersey in Dontae Strickland. At one point, they had a half dozen commits from south Florida but wound up only signing a pair. Keep an eye on tight end Amir Ealey as an edge guy with upside.

NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR:

Derwin James, Florida State, Safety. Has the size, speed and talent to play right away and make a difference. Rare talent as an elite big safety.

TOP SLEEPERS:

Duke landing two U.S. Army All-Americans further justifies the incredible job David Cutcliffe's staff is doing in Durham.

LIKELY TO BE THE BEST NFL PLAYER:

Josh Sweat. Huge upside with freaky good explosion and athleticism. Unreal frame and the smarts to go with it. Should help right away and has as big of an upside as any player that signed in the country last cycle.

NO. 1 SIGNING COUPS:

NC State getting four of the top 10 players in-state to stay home is unheard of. Johnny Frasier and Nyheim Hines should form a hellacious 1-2 punch in the backfield for years to come. Darian Roseboro is a beast on the defensive line and Emanuel McGirt is a franchise left tackle prospect.

BIGGEST MISSES:

Miami letting all of the best prospects escape Broward and Dade counties is a huge setback for their overall talent level. North Carolina not being able to keep five-star defensive tackle Shy Tuttle or Roseboro, two key in-state defensive linemen, at home hurts a position of need for the program.

BEST RECRUITING STAFF:

Clemson — Recruiting coordinator Jeff Scott delegates the territories and divvies up the assignments to a staff filled with capable recruiters. Brent Venables and Mike Reed put together strong classes, landing studs on the defensive line and in the secondary to reload the nation's No. 1 defense. Scott, along with Danny Pearman and Robbie Caldwell, helped load up the offensive skill and linemen for years to come.

TOP 20 INCOMING RECRUITS

RK	NAME	HT/WT	POS	HOMETOWN/SCHOOL	COLLEGE
1.	Derwin James	6-2/201	S	Haines City, Fla./Haines City Senior	Florida State
2.	Josh Sweat	6-5/240	DE	Chaesapeake, Va./Oscar Smith	Florida State
3.	Tarvarus McFadden	6-2/198	CB	Fort Lauderdale, Fla./American Heritage	Florida State
4.	Deon Cain	6-1/194	WR	Tampa, Fla./Tampa Bay Tech	Clemson
5.	George Campbell	6-3/184	WR	Tarpon Springs, Fla./East Lake	Florida State
6.	Mitch Hyatt	6-5/272	OT	Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett	Clemson
7.	Christian Wilkins	6-4/290	DT	Suffield, Conn./Suffield Academy	Clemson
8.	Jacques Patrick	6-1/230	RB	Orlando, Fla./Timber Creek	Florida State
9.	Jalen Dalton	6-5/235	DE	Clemmons, N.C./West Forsyth	North Carolina
10.	Deondre Francois	6-1/195	QB	Bradenton, Fla./IMG Academy	Florida State
11.	Johhny Frasier	5-10/229	RB	Princeton, N.C./Princeton	N.C. State
12.	Ray-Ray McCloud III	5-9/175	ATH	Tampa, Fla./Sickles	Clemson
13.	Mark Walton	5-10/179	RB	Miami, Fla./Booker T. Washington	Miami
14.	Albert Huggins	6-3/283	DT	Orangeburg, S.C./Orangeburg-Wilkinson	Clemson
15.	Abdul Bello	6-6/295	OT	Montverde, Fla./Montverde Academy	Florida State
16.	Mark Fields	5-11/190	CB	Cornelius, N.C./Hough	Clemson
17.	Da'Vante Phillips	6-2/204	WR	Miami, Fla./Central	Florida State
18.	Tim Settle	6-2/361	DT	Manassas, Va./Stonewall Jackson	Virginia Tech
19.	Jordan Whitehead	5-11/185	CB	Monaca, Pa./Central Valley	Pitt
20.	Darian Roseboro	6-4/285	DE	Lincolnton, N.C./Lincolnton	NC State

CLEMSON | TIGERS

ACC rank: 1 Record: 10-3 ACC record: 6-2 (2nd, Atlantic) Stadium: Clemson Memorial (80,301)

RANKING 9

TIGERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Clemson, S.C.
COACH: Dabo Swinney — At Clemson and overall: 61-26, 7 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Jeff Scott, Tony Elliott
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brent Venables

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2011
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2005
RETURNING STARTERS: 11; 7 offense, 3 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Deshaun Watson, RB Wayne Gallman, WR Mike Williams, WR Artavis Scott, DE Shaq Lawson, CB Mackensie Alexander, FS Jayron Kearse

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: With a healthy Watson, Clemson could return to being an offensive power nationally after a slight slip a year ago. He's the best quarterback in the league and can be a program-changer with the level of skill players joining him. There are several freshmen who could make major impact by the end of the season.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: There's a huge loss in leadership and production on defense. While the first team still looks pretty good on paper, there won't be the same kind of depth if starters go down. Watson still has to shake the injury-prone tag and make it through a full season. With expectations of winning the ACC, Clemson doesn't want to rely on a backup quarterback again.

MIKE WILLIAMS
Photo by Joshua S. Kelly-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Quarterback Deshaun Watson threw for 1,466 yards and 14 touchdowns, with just two interceptions, and completed 67.9 percent of his passes in eight games last season.

But his whirlwind freshman season was cut short because of three injuries, the last being a torn ACL that required surgery. He expects to be ready to go with no limitations to open the season, when he will be the ACC's most-talented quarterback.

He is surrounded by an exciting group of skill position players. Receiver Mike Williams is coming off a 1,000-yard season, while Artavis Scott caught a team-high 76 passes and eight touchdowns as a freshman. Germone Hooper is poised for a breakout year.

The three top rushers from 2014 and six total backs give Clemson plenty of backfield options, but Wayne Gallman left the spring as the No. 1.

The Tigers are also bringing in a pair of talented freshmen playmakers in Deon Cain and Ray-Ray McCloud. Both should contribute right away.

The offensive line returns just two starters, but there is no shortage of bodies. Four highly recruited freshmen enrolled in January and are competing for two-deep spots.

DEFENSE

Clemson lost eight starters, including first-round NFL Draft picks Vic Beasley and Stephone Anthony, off a defense that ranked first nationally in 2014. But the Tigers believe there's enough returning talent, especially in the starting group, to keep from suffering a massive drop-off.

Shaq Lawson, who has 7.5 sacks in two seasons, is poised for a big season as he takes over Beasley's role at defensive end. Even though D.J. Reader and Carlos Watkins weren't starters a year ago, they give Clemson experience at the tackle spots. Kevin Dodd made big strides in the spring and will man the other end spot.

"Not a huge difference between Shaq Lawson and Vic Beasley."
— Dabo Swinney

B.J. Goodson is the top returning linebacker, and he learned from Anthony about how to be a leader. Ben Boulware was named a starter in early spring and never gave up that spot. Korrin Wiggins is back to play a linebacker/nickel hybrid role after a solid 2014 season.

Mackensie Alexander has pro aspirations and is the team's best cornerback. Experienced safeties Jayron Kearse and Jadar Johnson can help make up for mistakes in a deep secondary.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Ammon Lakip returns after making 75 percent of his field goals a year ago. Andy Teasdall has just three career punts, but he won the job with a steady spring. Kickoff and punt return duties are still up for grabs, and heralded freshmen could claim those roles.

OVERVIEW

Dabo Swinney seemingly has this program rolling toward something bigger, but offense will have to carry a heavy load this season. It looks like the Nov. 7 home game against Florida State will be for the division title — with the winner being a heavy favorite in the ACC Championship Game. Clemson has the talent, and the quarterback, to win the league.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR/RB Ray-Ray McCloud: He rushed for 5,568 yards and 55 touchdowns in three years at Hillsborough County (Fla.) High School, and was ranked No. 81 nationally by 247Sports. He could be used as a receiver or running back, as well as in special packages and on kick returns.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	4	**Deshaun Watson***	6-2	205	So.
RB	9	**Wayne Gallman***	6-1	205	So.
WR	7	**Mike Williams***	6-4	210	Jr.
WR	3	Artavis Scott	5-10	190	So.
WR	19	Charone Peake	6-2	205	Sr.
TE	16	**Jordan Leggett***	6-5	250	Jr.
LT	79	**Isaiah Battle***	6-7	290	Sr.
LG	78	Eric Mac Lain	6-4	305	Sr.
C	58	**Ryan Norton***	6-3	285	Sr.
RG	55	Tyrone Crowder	6-2	330	So.
RT	73	Joe Gore	6-5	290	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	90	Shaq Lawson	6-3	275	Jr.
DT	48	D.J. Reader	6-2	325	Sr.
DT	94	Carlos Watkins	6-3	295	Jr.
DE	98	Kevin Dodd	6-5	275	Jr.
LB	44	B.J. Goodson	6-0	240	Sr.
LB	10	Ben Boulware	6-0	235	Jr.
LB/NB	12	**Korrin Wiggins***	5-11	195	Jr.
CB	2	**Mackensie Alexander***	5-10	190	So.
CB	25	Cordrea Tankersley	6-1	195	Jr.
SS	18	Jadar Johnson	6-0	200	Jr.
FS	20	**Jayron Kearse***	6-4	210	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	36	**Ammon Lakip***	5-11	200	Sr.
P	95	Andy Teasdall	5-11	185	Jr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	WOFFORD
Sept. 12	APPALACHIAN STATE
Sept. 17	at Louisville
Oct. 3	NOTRE DAME
Oct. 10	GEORGIA TECH
Oct. 17	BOSTON COLLEGE
Oct. 24	at Miami
Oct. 31	at NC State
Nov. 7	FLORIDA STATE
Nov. 14	at Syracuse
Nov. 21	WAKE FOREST
Nov. 28	at South Carolina

2014 RESULTS

L	at Georgia	21-45
W	SOUTH CAROLINA STATE	73-7
L	at Florida State (OT)	17-23
W	NORTH CAROLINA	50-35
W	NC STATE	41-0
W	LOUISVILLE	23-17
W	at Boston College	17-13
W	SYRACUSE	16-6
W	at Wake Forest	34-20
L	at Georgia Tech	6-28
W	GEORGIA STATE	28-0
W	SOUTH CAROLINA	35-17
	Russell Athletic Bowl	
W	vs. Oklahoma	40-6

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	30.8	51
Rushing	146.5	88
Passing	261.8	38
Total	408.3	58
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	16.7	3
Rushing	103.4	5
Passing	157.4	2
Total	260.8	1
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 6	+ 0.46	T-33

FLORIDA STATE | SEMINOLES

ACC rank: 2 Record: 13-1 ACC record: 8-0 (1st, Atlantic) Stadium: Doak Campbell Stadium (82,300)

RANKING 12

SEMINOLES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Tallahassee, Fla.
COACH: Jimbo Fisher — At FSU and overall: 58-11, 5 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Randy Sanders, Lawrence Dawsey
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Charles Kelly

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 1981
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 4 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Sean Maguire, RB Dalvin Cook, RB Jacques Patrick, WR Travis Rudolph, DT Derrick Mitchell, LB Terrance Smith, CB Jalen Ramsey

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: FSU's secondary is one of the nation's best with Ramsey, safety Nate Andrews and newcomer Derwin James. The 'Noles have a deep group of running backs with Cook, Patrick and Mario Pender. The receivers are inexperienced but talented.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: FSU's offense won't be the same without its 2013 Heisman Trophy winner (QB Jameis Winston), the school's all-time receptions leader (WR Rashad Greene) and the 2014 Mackey Award winner (TE Nick O'Leary). And four starters on the offensive line have moved on to the NFL. The lack of a pass rush (17 sacks in 2014) could again haunt FSU.

DALVIN COOK
Photo by Ron Chenoy-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

FSU coach Jimbo Fisher is known for developing quarterbacks, but he also embraces the run and wants his pro-style offense to be balanced.

Dalvin Cook ran for 1,008 yards and eight touchdowns last season as a true freshman in just 13 games. Displaying toughness as he broke tackles at the line, he frequently found openings in defenses ... and then used a burst to break off big gains. Cook accumulated 738 rushing yards and five touchdowns in the final seven games.

Fisher left the quarterback competition open going into the summer, saying he had no timeline to name a starter. But Fisher said he's "very comfortable" with junior Sean Maguire, who started against Clemson last September when Jameis Winston was suspended. Maguire is ahead of J.J. Cosentino, De'Andre Johnson and John Franklin.

FSU's young receivers should blossom in 2015 after having a year in the offense. Travis Rudolph is the best of a talented group that includes Jesus Wilson, Ermon Lane, Ja'Vonn Harrison, George Campbell and Da'Vante Phillips.

Despite not having a full-time returning starting offensive lineman, Fisher said he's pleased with how the backups have evolved into starters. Left tackle Roderick Johnson (who started the final five games) anchors a line that should feature two junior college blockers in right tackle Chad Mavety and left guard Kareem Are.

DEFENSE

With a resume that includes coaching South Carolina's Jadeveon Clowney and Florida's Dante Fowler, Brad Lawing is now tasked with directing FSU's defensive ends and outside linebackers. Defensive end DeMarcus Walker could lead the way, improving on his 38-tackle season as a sophomore.

FSU will start two seniors at linebacker in Terrance Smith and Reggie Northrup. Smith is a versatile talent who played through a knee injury last season. Northrup is a run-stopper who led FSU with 122 tackles.

The secondary is among the best in the nation, despite losing both starting corners (P.J. Williams and Ronald Darby). Fisher chose to move Jalen Ramsey from the star/nickel position to boundary corner, where he will be an imposing, physical presence, making life miserable for opponent's No. 1 receivers.

While FSU has two veterans at safety in Nate Andrews and Tyler Hunter, freshman Derwin James will make a push to take on a starting role. Trey Marshall has the talent and versatility to step into Ramsey's old "star" position.

"It killed me to watch it."
— RB Dalvin Cook, on reliving his two second-half fumbles in a playoff loss to Oregon

SPECIAL TEAMS

Roberto Aguayo, who won the Lou Groza Award in 2013 as a freshman, has made 48 of 52 career field-goal attempts and can convert from 50 yards if needed. Cason Beatty struggled with his consistency in 2014, but averaged 41.0 yards per punt.

OVERVIEW

Expectations remain high for Florida State after a three-year stretch in which the program won 39 games. There will be a learning curve, and a win at Clemson is probably a must, but there's enough talent on offense and defense for FSU to put together a 10-win season and win its fourth straight ACC title.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Jacques Patrick: The 6-1, 232-pound Patrick enrolled early and ran for 81 yards on 16 carries in FSU's spring game. Patrick was chosen the Florida Gatorade Player of the Year in 2014 after a prep career in which he compiled 7,922 rushing yards and 103 touchdowns.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	10	Sean Maguire	6-3	224	Jr.
RB	**4**	**Dalvin Cook***	**6-0**	**203**	**So.**
FB	**23**	**Freddie Stevenson***	**6-1**	**244**	**Jr.**
WR	**15**	**Travis Rudolph***	**6-2**	**187**	**So.**
WR	**3**	**Jesus Wilson***	**5-9**	**181**	**Jr.**
TE	81	Ryan Izzo	6-6	243	Fr.
LT	77	Roderick Johnson	6-7	312	So.
LG	72	Kareem Are	6-6	330	Jr.
C	54	Alec Eberle	6-5	294	Fr.
RG	78	Wilson Bell	6-4	318	So.
RT	55	Chad Mavety	6-5	327	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	44	DeMarcus Walker	6-3	227	Jr.
DT	**11**	**Derrick Mitchell***	**6-4**	**307**	**Sr.**
DT	**99**	**Nile Lawrence-Stample***	**6-1**	**323**	**Sr.**
DE	16	Jacob Pugh	6-4	247	So.
LB	**24**	**Terrance Smith***	**6-4**	**231**	**Sr.**
LB	**5**	**Reggie Northrup***	**6-1**	**226**	**Sr.**
CB	**8**	**Jalen Ramsey***	**6-1**	**201**	**Jr.**
CB	27	Marquez White	6-0	179	Jr.
STAR	20	Trey Marshall	6-0	203	So.
SS	**1**	**Tyler Hunter***	**5-11**	**204**	**Sr.**
FS	**29**	**Nate Andrews***	**5-11**	**204**	**Jr.**
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	**19**	**Roberto Aguayo***	**6-1**	**204**	**Jr.**
P	**38**	**Cason Beatty***	**6-3**	**215**	**Sr.**

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	TEXAS STATE
Sept. 12	SOUTH FLORIDA
Sept. 18	at Boston College
Oct. 3	at Wake Forest
Oct. 10	MIAMI
Oct. 17	LOUISVILLE
Oct. 24	at Georgia Tech
Oct. 31	SYRACUSE
Nov. 7	at Clemson
Nov. 14	NC STATE
Nov. 21	CHATTANOOGA
Nov. 28	at Florida

2014 RESULTS

W	vs. Oklahoma State (Arlington, TX)	37-31
W	THE CITADEL	37-12
W	CLEMSON (OT)	23-17
W	at NC State	56-41
W	WAKE FOREST	43-3
W	at Syracuse	38-20
W	NOTRE DAME	31-27
W	at Louisville	42-31
W	VIRGINIA	34-20
W	at Miami	30-26
W	BOSTON COLLEGE	20-17
W	FLORIDA	24-19
	ACC Championship Game	
W	vs. Georgia Tech	37-35
	Rose Bowl - Semifinal	
L	vs. Oregon	59-20

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	33.7	33
Rushing	138.1	95
Passing	303.3	14
Total	441.4	35
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.6	49
Rushing	170.1	71
Passing	226.8	59
Total	396.9	61
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 6	- 0.43	101

GEORGIA TECH | YELLOW JACKETS

ACC rank: 3 | Record: 11-3 | ACC record: 6-2 (1st, Coastal) | Stadium: Bobby Dodd Stadium (55,000)

RANKING 15

YELLOW JACKETS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Atlanta, Ga.
COACH: Paul Johnson — At Georgia Tech: 59-35, 7 years; overall: 165-74, 18 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Paul Johnson
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Ted Roof

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2009
LAST BOWL: 1996
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 6 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Justin Thomas, AB Broderick Snoddy, C Freddie Burden, NT Adam Gotsis, DT Jabari Hunt-Days, DE KeShun Freeman, LB P.J. Davis, CB D.J. White

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Georgia Tech has one of the best quarterbacks in the ACC with Justin Thomas running Paul Johnson's spread-option attack. Thomas can make big plays with his feet and dish the ball to his best playmakers on offense. Defensively, this has the potential to be the best overall unit in the Johnson era.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Experience is lacking at a number of positions simply because these players have had to wait their turn. The Jackets finished a lowly 79th in total defense last season, despite Tech's offense finishing third in time of possession. The Jackets gave up 6.3 yards per play.

JAMAL GOLDEN
Photo by Mike Jula

OFFENSE

Quarterback Justin Thomas won 11 games in his first season at the helm of the spread option attack, and he is considered a Heisman hopeful heading into this season.

He had five 100-yard rushing games last season, but the question for Tech is: Who will run the ball at B-back and A-back?

Projected B-back starter C.J. Leggett suffered a torn ACL in the last week of spring camp; his backup, Quaide Weimerskirch, went down a week earlier with a season-ending foot injury.

Coach Paul Johnson moved Marcus Allen from receiver to B-back in the last week of practice after Weimerskirch's injury. Allen goes into the season as the projected starter, with Stanford senior transfer Patrick Skov and a pair of true freshmen — Mikell Lands-Davis and Marcus Marshall — in the mix as backups.

Skov is the wildcard, given his 39 games of playing experience in the Pac-12.

The A-backs might be inexperienced, but the position is loaded with speed, led by Broderick Snoddy and late bloomer Dennis Andrews. Freshmen Clinton Lynch and Qua Searcy add more speed, along with walk-on Ike Willis.

The Jackets' top two wide receivers are gone, leaving Micheal Summers as the lone wideout with starting experience. He has 15 career receptions for 245 yards.

DEFENSE

Third-year coordinator Ted Roof has his deepest group of talent.

With three returning starters on the defensive line, last year's weakness could turn into a strong point. Defensive tackle Jabari Hunt-Days is back from academic issues, and end Kenderius Whitehead, who began his career at NC State, will add some pass rush, along with the returning starters.

P.J. Davis has been a production machine for the Jackets and he continues to improve his understanding of Roof's defense. Davis and a group of veterans will anchor the linebacker spots.

The secondary may be the deepest in a long time for Tech with four senior starters and three veteran backups. D.J. White is one of the top corners in the ACC.

> **"He's more comfortable with what we're asking him to do and understands it better ... he's going to have to be a leader."**
> **— Paul Johnson on Justin Thomas**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Junior Harrison Butker saved the UGA game with a 53-yard field goal, and he set a school scoring record for kickers. Ryan Rodwell had the fewest number of punts in the ACC; he averaged 40.2 yards on 32 attempts as a sophomore.

Jamal Golden was a top national punt and kick returner in 2012, but he has struggled to get back to that level after missing 2013 with a shoulder injury. Snoddy, Searcy and Chris Milton will also be in the mix as returners.

OVERVIEW

The Jackets should be favored to repeat as Coastal champions, but the road to the ACC championship and the CFB playoffs will be much harder. This will be the toughest schedule Johnson has had in his tenure; it includes a four-game stretch against Notre Dame, Duke, UNC and Clemson ... as well as a date with Florida State in October in Atlanta.

TOP NEWCOMER

AB Qua Searcy: In his redshirt year, Qua Searcy played three different positions for the Jackets and nearly saw game action at corner. This fall, he will be at A-back, where he impressed in the spring game with his speed, quickness and toughness.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	5	Justin Thomas*	5-11	189	Jr.
BB	24	Marcus Allen	6-2	225	Jr.
AB	22	Broderick Snoddy	5-9	190	Sr.
AB	3	Dennis Andrews	6-0	194	Jr.
WR	84	Micheal Summers*	6-1	196	Jr.
WR	81	Ricky Jeune	6-3	214	So.
LT	53	Bryan Chamberlain*	6-4	295	Sr.
LG	78	Trey Braun*	6-5	294	Sr.
C	58	Freddie Burden*	6-3	302	Jr.
RG	71	Shamire Devine	6-7	365	So.
RT	75	Errin Joe*	6-3	313	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	41	Rod Rook-Chungong	6-3	243	Jr.
NT	96	Adam Gotsis*	6-5	282	Sr.
DT	32	Jabari Hunt-Days	6-3	261	Sr.
DE	42	KeShun Freeman*	6-1	236	So.
LB	35	Tyler Marcordes	6-4	235	Sr.
LB	2	Anthony Harrell	6-2	237	Sr.
LB	40	P.J. Davis*	5-11	218	Jr.
CB	28	D.J. White*	5-11	188	Sr.
CB	6	Chris Milton*	5-11	190	Sr.
SS	12	Demond Smith*	6-0	191	Sr.
FS	4	Jamal Golden*	6-0	193	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	87	Harrison Butker*	6-3	202	Jr.
P	85	Ryan Rodwell*	6-2	188	Jr.

*Returning starters in bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	ALCORN STATE
Sept. 12	TULANE
Sept. 19	at Notre Dame
Sept. 26	at Duke
Oct. 3	NORTH CAROLINA
Oct. 10	at Clemson
Oct. 17	PITTSBURGH
Oct. 24	FLORIDA STATE
Oct. 31	at Virginia
Nov. 12	VIRGINIA TECH
Nov. 21	at Miami
Nov. 28	at Georgia

2014 RESULTS

W	WOFFORD	38-19
W	at Tulane	38-21
W	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	42-38
W	at Virginia Tech	27-24
W	MIAMI	28-17
L	DUKE	25-31
L	at North Carolina	43-48
W	at Pittsburgh	56-28
W	VIRGINIA	35-10
W	at NC State	56-23
W	CLEMSON	28-6
W	at Georgia (2OT)	30-24
	ACC Championship Game	
L	vs. Florida State	35-37
	Orange Bowl	
W	vs. Mississippi State	49-34

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	37.9	11
Rushing	342.1	1
Passing	134.4	121
Total	476.5	19
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.7	52
Rushing	167.6	62
Passing	243.7	87
Total	411.3	79
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 11	+ 0.79	14

VIRGINIA TECH | HOKIES

ACC rank: 4 Record: 7-6 ACC record: 3-5 (T-5th, Coastal) Stadium: Lane Stadium (65,632)

RANKING 24

HOKIES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Blacksburg, Va.
COACH: Frank Beamer — At Virginia Tech: 231-115-2, 28 years; overall: 273-138-4, 34 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Scot Loeffler
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Bud Foster

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2010
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 1992
RETURNING STARTERS: 18; 8 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Michael Brewer, WR Isaiah Ford, WR Cam Phillips, TE Bucky Hodges, DE Dadi Nicolas, DE Ken Ekanem, DT Luther Maddy, CB Kendall Fuller

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The defense, as usual, figures to be the strength of the Hokies. But with a bevy of returning skill players, including Brewer, Tech has the potential for a vastly improved offense. Ford, Phillips and Hodges are good targets for Brewer, who should direct a balanced attack.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The offensive line performed admirably in the spring, but until it does that in a game, it'll remain a question mark. Brewer has to cut down on the interceptions (15 last season). Defensively, Tech is replacing a pair of three-year starters at safety.

MICHAEL BREWER
Photo by Steve Beyer

OFFENSE

When Virginia Tech hired offensive coordinator Scot Loeffler before the 2013 season, he pointed to 2015 as the year when the offense had a chance to be special. It's put-up-or-shut-up time for a unit that failed to score a point in regulation against Wake Forest last season.

Senior quarterback Michael Brewer, a former transfer from Texas Tech, is behind center for his second season with the Hokies. He's surrounded by more weapons than Tech has had in recent years.

Sophomore tight end Bucky Hodges can move out wide to create matchup problems. Hodges and sophomore wide receivers Isaiah Ford and Cam Phillips have the ability to beat defenses one-on-one, giving the Hokies a big-play element they've been lacking.

The running game showed signs of life last season before the tailback spot was decimated by injuries. The team's most promising young backs, Marshawn Williams (knee) and Shai McKenzie (knee, indefinite suspension) missed spring ball. Senior J.C. Coleman came on at the end of last year, running for 468 yards in the final four games.

The question, recently, has been the line. But for the first time in years, this much-maligned unit went through spring practice with a set lineup.

DEFENSE

Several players went through offseason injuries or surgeries, but Virginia Tech has a good chance to boast one of the ACC's top defenses, yet again.

Up front, the Hokies went through spring without defensive tackles Luther Maddy (knee) and Corey Marshall (ankle), and defensive end Ken Ekanem (shoulder). All three figure to be all-conference level talents. Senior defensive end Dadi Nicolas might be the defense's most dynamic player, and sophomore Seth Dooley emerged as a third option at end.

Sophomore linebacker Andrew Motuapuaka started four straight games last season when Chase Williams was out with a knee injury, and Motuapuaka reached double-digit tackles in all of them.

If there's a question mark on the defense, it's in the secondary, where the Hokies replace a pair of three-year starters at safety in Kyshoen Jarrett and Detrick Bonner. Tech's top two cornerbacks, Kendall Fuller (wrist) and Brandon Facyson (leg), sat out the spring with injuries.

> "He's real big with urgency right now, attacking everything that we do with great detail."
>
> — QB Michael Brewer, on OC Scot Loeffler

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior punter A.J. Hughes sat out spring practice with a back injury. He averaged 39.9 yards per punt in 2014, the lowest mark of his three years with the Hokies.

Sophomore Joey Slye, the starting place-kicker last season, is competing with redshirt freshman Michael Santamaria to hold on to that spot. Slye converted 20 of 28 field goal attempts last year.

OVERVIEW

Virginia Tech might finally have the offensive pieces in place to give its defense the support it needs to contend for an ACC title. A matchup with national champion Ohio State to open the season will draw the most headlines, but a relatively easy conference schedule may help the Hokies return to the league title game for the first time since 2011.

TOP NEWCOMER

DB Mook Reynolds: The true freshman enrolled early, which helped him get in the weight program and add some needed pounds. Reynolds, listed at 6-0, 172 pounds, will offer the Hokies versatility as either a cornerback or nickel back. He was voted the team's top newcomer in the spring.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	12	**Michael Brewer***	6-0	200	Sr.
RB	4	J.C. Coleman	5-7	190	Sr.
FB	45	**Sam Rogers***	5-10	220	Jr.
WR	1	**Isaiah Ford***	6-1	180	So.
WR	5	**Cam Phillips***	6-1	196	So.
TE	7	**Bucky Hodges***	6-6	249	So.
LT	71	**Jonathan McLaughlin***	6-5	310	Jr.
LG	57	**Wyatt Teller***	6-6	295	So.
C	64	Eric Gallo	6-2	293	So.
RG	72	**Augie Conte***	6-6	297	Jr.
RT	77	Wade Hansen	6-5	300	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	90	**Dadi Nicolas***	6-4	236	Sr.
DT	92	**Luther Maddy***	6-1	293	Sr.
DT	96	**Corey Marshall***	6-2	262	Sr.
DE	4	**Ken Ekanem***	6-3	243	Jr.
LB	40	**Deon Clarke***	6-2	213	Sr.
LB	54	Andrew Motuapuaka	6-0	223	So.
LB	37	Ronny Vandyke	6-4	219	Sr.
CB	11	**Kendall Fuller***	6-0	197	Jr.
CB	31	**Brandon Facyson***	6-2	184	So.
ROV	21	C.J. Reavis	6-1	205	So.
FS	2	**Donovan Riley***	5-11	210	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	46	**Joey Slye***	5-10	221	So.
P	27	**A.J. Hughes***	6-1	195	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	OHIO STATE
Sept. 12	FURMAN
Sept. 19	at Purdue
Sept. 26	at East Carolina
Oct. 3	PITTSBURGH
Oct. 9	NC STATE
Oct. 17	at Miami
Oct. 24	DUKE
Oct. 31	at Boston College
Nov. 12	at Georgia Tech
Nov. 21	NORTH CAROLINA
Nov. 28	at Virginia

2014 RESULTS

W	WILLIAM & MARY	34-9
W	at Ohio State	35-21
L	EAST CAROLINA	21-28
L	GEORGIA TECH	24-27
W	WESTERN MICHIGAN	35-17
W	at North Carolina	34-17
L	at Pittsburgh	16-21
L	MIAMI	6-30
L	BOSTON COLLEGE	31-33
W	at Duke	17-16
L	at Wake Forest (2OT)	3-6
W	VIRGINIA	24-20
	Military Bowl	
W	vs. Cincinnati	33-17

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	24.1	93
Rushing	147.9	86
Passing	217.4	75
Total	365.3	96
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	20.2	14
Rushing	144.8	39
Passing	199.0	25
Total	343.8	21
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 4	- 0.31	T-89

NC STATE | WOLFPACK

ACC rank: 5 Record: 8-5 ACC record: 3-5 (5th, Atlantic) Stadium: Carter-Finley Stadium (57,600)

RANKING 33

WOLFPACK at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Raleigh, N.C.
COACH: Dave Doeren — At NC State: 11-14, 2 years; overall: 34-18, 4 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Matt Canada
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Dave Huxtable

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1979
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 7 offense, 7 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Jacoby Brissett, RB Matt Dayes, RB Shadrach Thornton, RB Nyheim Hines, TE David J. Grinnage, DE Mike Rose, CB Jack Tocho

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Brissett is dangerous as a runner and passer. He will have plenty of help in the backfield, too. NC State averaged 204.5 rushing yards per game last season, its best mark since 1992. All five starters return in the secondary, including the team's top tackler, safety Hakim Jones.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: There are two new tackles on the offensive line and there isn't much speed or playmaking ability at receiver. Three main pieces on the defensive front need to be replaced.

OFFENSE

Quarterback Jacoby Brissett helped turn around NC State in coach Dave Doeren's second season. The Florida transfer threw for 2,606 yards and ran for 529 in his first season as the starter.

He will have a lot of different options on offense in his senior season.

Senior running back Shadrach Thornton led the team in rushing (907 yards) a year ago. Junior running back Matt Dayes is the team's top returning receiver (32 catches) and led the team in touchdowns (13).

They will be joined in the backfield by a wave of highly touted freshmen. Johnny Frasier, Nyheim Hines and Reggie Gallaspy II are in-state products who will complement Thornton and Dayes. Running back Jaylen Samuels and tight end David J. Grinnage will also be major parts of the passing game.

The line could be strong again if freshman Tyler Jones and senior Alex Barr, who has 18 career starts at guard, can step in at the tackle positions.

DEFENSE

NC State's defense looks to build on a strong finish from last season that included more blitzing schemes and fewer yards and points allowed. The Wolfpack returns seven starters on defense, including five in the secondary.

Senior safety Hakim Jones led the team in tackles (80), and sophomore safety Josh Jones came on at the end of the season with a team-best four interceptions.

Sophomore linebackers Jerod Fernandez and Airius Moore got better as the season progressed and will have to continue to improve. They should get help with the return of junior M.J. Salahuddin, a starter in 2013 who missed all of last season with a knee injury.

Getting pressure from the outside linebacker and nickel spots on blitzes was a proven formula by the end of the season. Half of the team's 30 sacks on the season came in the last four games.

Three main pieces need to be replaced up front.

JACOBY BRISSET
Photo by Brian Tirpak

"We're going to have a special offense. We have a lot of different weapons."
— QB Jacoby Brissett

Senior defensive end Mike Rose and sophomore defensive tackle Kentavius Street lead a group that is young, but actually has a lot of experience.

SPECIAL TEAMS

A pair of freshmen — kicker Kyle Bambard and punter A.J. Cole — will have to replace a pair of four-year starters. Bambard, a versatile high school athlete, has to step in for Niklas Sade. Cole had a strong spring. At 6-4, 230 pounds, he is built like the lanky Wil Baumann, who had his best college season in 2014.

OVERVIEW

NC State hopes to build on the progress of last season, after improving from 3-9 to 8-5. The Wolfpack should be in good shape with Brissett back at quarterback and a deep running back rotation. In order for NC State to improve again, it has to figure out how to win on the road in the division, where it's just 3-23 since the ACC expanded in 2005.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Johnny Frasier: He originally committed to Florida State, but switched to stay in-state. Frasier rushed for 2,266 yards as a senior at Princeton High School and amassed 7,100 yards and 99 touchdowns in his prep career. Rated No. 75 nationally by 247Sports.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	12	Jacoby Brissett*	6-4	235	Sr.
RB	21	Matt Dayes	5-9	203	Jr.
WR	NA	Nyheim Hines	5-9	187	Fr.
WR	85	Jumichael Ramos	6-2	200	Jr.
WR	13	Bra'Lon Cherry*	5-11	188	Jr.
TE	86	David J. Grinnage*	6-5	274	Jr.
LT	53	Tyler Jones	6-3	290	Fr.
LG	54	Joe Thuney*	6-5	288	Sr.
C	60	Quinton Schooley*	6-4	308	Sr.
RG	50	Tony Adams*	6-2	318	So.
RT	71	Alex Barr*	6-8	326	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	49	Bradley Chubb	6-4	257	So.
DT	35	Kentavius Street	6-2	278	So.
DT	98	B.J. Hill	6-4	294	So.
DE	90	Mike Rose*	6-3	277	Sr.
LB	4	Jerod Fernandez*	6-0	231	So.
LB	58	Airius Moore	6-0	232	So.
CB	29	Jack Tocho*	6-0	198	Jr.
CB	11	Juston Burris*	6-1	207	Sr.
S	8	Dravious Wright*	5-10	205	Jr.
SS	2	Josh Jones*	6-2	215	So.
FS	20	Hakim Jones*	6-2	200	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	92	Kyle Bambard	5-8	188	Fr.
P	90	A.J. Cole III	6-4	230	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	TROY
Sept. 12	EASTERN KENTUCKY
Sept. 19	at Old Dominion
Sept. 26	at South Alabama
Oct. 3	LOUISVILLE
Oct. 9	at Virginia Tech
Oct. 24	at Wake Forest
Oct. 31	CLEMSON
Nov. 7	at Boston College
Nov. 14	at Florida State
Nov. 21	SYRACUSE
Nov. 28	NORTH CAROLINA

2014 RESULTS

W	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	24-23
W	OLD DOMINION	46-34
W	at South Florida	49-17
W	PRESBYTERIAN	42-0
L	FLORIDA STATE	41-56
L	at Clemson	0-41
L	BOSTON COLLEGE	14-30
L	at Louisville	18-30
W	at Syracuse	24-17
L	GEORGIA TECH	23-56
W	WAKE FOREST	42-13
W	at North Carolina	35-7
	St. Petersburg Bowl	
W	vs. UCF	34-27

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	30.2	55
Rushing	204.5	37
Passing	204.0	82
Total	408.5	57
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.0	T-65
Rushing	168.4	T-65
Passing	204.7	30
Total	373.1	46
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 5	+ 0.38	T-37

LOUISVILLE | CARDINALS

ACC rank: 6 Record: 9-4 ACC record: 5-3 (3rd, Atlantic) Stadium: Papa John's Cardinal Stadium (55,000)

RANKING 35

CARDINALS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Louisville, Ky.
COACH: Bobby Petrino — At Louisville: 50-13, 5 years; overall: 92-34, 11 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Garrick McGee
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Todd Grantham

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2012, Big East, co-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2009
RETURNING STARTERS: 10; 5 offense, 4 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Reggie Bonnafon, RB Brandon Radcliff, WR James Quick, DE Sheldon Rankins, LB James Burgess, LB Keith Kelsey, LB/DE Devonte Fields, S Josh Harvey-Clemons

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Louisville has the makings of a physical defensive front a season after the Cardinals ranked 10th in the nation in rushing defense. Bonnafon, who looked more comfortable this spring, is the kind of dual-threat quarterback that allows Petrino to use the read option and other designed QB runs to keep defenses off balance.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The most glaring issue for Louisville, for the second-consecutive season, is its offensive line. Versatile junior college transfer Khalil Hunter should plug in somewhere, but the Cards only have one truly reliable offensive lineman and don't have a ton of depth.

SHELDON RANKINS
Photo by Jamie Rhodes-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

The running backs and receivers yet again make up some of Louisville's best position groups.

Running back Brandon Radcliff became a key figure last fall, running for a team-best 737 yards and 12 touchdowns while surpassing Michael Dyer and Dominique Brown on the depth chart. Behind him, burly fullback/tailback combo L.J. Scott showed signs of his talent as a downhill runner, and junior college transfer Jeremy Smith is a bruising back who can immediately help.

Replacing DeVante Parker won't be easy, and the receiving corps also took a big hit with its depth.

Ja'Quay Savage, Jamari Staples and Alphonso Carter are tall, physical receivers who can make plays down field. Sophomores Javonte Bagley and Dontez Byrd are among those who will help with depth.

Of course, the spotlight is always on the quarterback, and improved sophomore Reggie Bonnafon should be the guy, although there are options should he falter.

Will Gardner, who began last season as the starter, will return from knee surgery this summer. Redshirt sophomore Kyle Bolin, once considered the best high school QB in the state, filled in admirably late last season when Bonnafon was hurt. Penn State transfer Tyler Ferguson and incoming freshman Lamar Jackson just add to the talented mix.

DEFENSE

For the first half of last season, U of L's swarming pass rush and interception-hungry secondary helped the Cards rank among the best in the nation before they slowed down against better competition.

They technically scheme as a 3-4, but coordinator Todd Grantham often morphed his group into a 3-3-5 package, using his third linebacker, Lorenzo Mauldin, as a blitzer. Mauldin, a fourth-round draft pick in May, is gone, replaced by former TCU standout Devonte Fields and tenacious redshirt sophomore Stacy Thomas.

But for Louisville's defense to start as well as it did last fall, the Cardinals need five guys to play big roles.

> "I had the opportunity to play as a true freshman, and I think that worked to my advantage."
>
> — QB Reggie Bonnafon

Defensive end Sheldon Rankins was a bully as an interior pass rusher, and surpassed Mauldin in sacks late in the season. James Burgess and Keith Kelsey, versatile, strong linebackers who Grantham calls the brains of the operation, are vital to directing traffic.

And safeties Chucky Williams and Josh Harvey-Clemons need to find a way to fill the interception and big-hit voids left by Gerod Holliman (14 picks last fall) and James Sample.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior John Wallace (15 of 19 field goal attempts) has proven to be a reliable kicker. He expanded his range in 2014. Josh Appleby steps in at punter after getting some reps last fall.

OVERVIEW

The second year of the new Petrino era will put the coach's abilities to the test. He'll have a shaky offensive line and a mostly new group of receivers around, presumably, Bonnafon. The defense should be strong again, but how the Cards handle their rough slate of September games (Auburn, Houston and Clemson) could determine the fate of their season. Anything less than 8-4 would be disappointing.

TOP NEWCOMER

S Josh Harvey-Clemons: He's built like an outside linebacker at 6-5, 230, but he's quick and strong enough to keep up with smaller, faster receivers. He compiled 66 tackles and an interception as a sophomore at Georgia before transferring to Louisville and sitting out last season.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	7	**Reggie Bonnafon***	6-3	209	So.
RB	23	**Brandon Radcliff***	5-9	214	Jr.
WR	19	Ja'Quay Savage	6-3	214	Sr.
WR	2	Jamari Staples	6-4	195	Jr.
SLOT	17	**James Quick***	6-1	191	Jr.
TE	89	Keith Towbridge	6-5	261	Jr.
LT	78	**Aaron Epps***	6-7	288	Sr.
LG	73	Pedro Sibiea	6-3	300	Jr.
C	61	**Tobijah Hughley***	6-3	289	Jr.
RG	50	Khalil Hunter	6-4	300	Jr.
RT	76	Kelby Johnson	6-7	297	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	98	**Sheldon Rankins***	6-2	303	Sr.
NT	97	DeAngelo Brown	6-1	308	Jr.
DE	44	**Pio Vatuvei***	6-2	296	Sr.
LB	NA	Devonte Fields	6-4	240	Jr.
LB	13	**James Burgess***	6-0	229	Sr.
LB	55	**Keith Kelsey***	6-1	236	Jr.
CB	29	Trumaine Washington	5-10	183	So.
CB	6	Shaq Wiggins	5-10	171	Jr.
NB	27	Jermaine Reve	6-0	192	Sr.
S	25	Josh Harvey-Clemons	6-5	230	Sr.
S	22	Chucky Williams	6-2	204	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	45	**John Wallace***	6-0	190	Sr.
P	40	Joshua Appleby	6-3	222	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	vs. Auburn (Atlanta, GA)
Sept. 12	HOUSTON
Sept. 17	CLEMSON
Sept. 26	SAMFORD
Oct. 3	at NC State
Oct. 17	at Florida State
Oct. 24	BOSTON COLLEGE
Oct. 30	at Wake Forest
Nov. 7	SYRACUSE
Nov. 14	VIRGINIA
Nov. 21	at Pittsburgh
Nov. 28	at Kentucky

2014 RESULTS

W	MIAMI	31-13
W	MURRAY STATE	66-21
L	at Virginia	21-23
W	at FIU	34-3
W	WAKE FOREST	20-10
W	at Syracuse	28-6
L	at Clemson	17-23
W	NC STATE	30-18
L	FLORIDA STATE	31-42
W	at Boston College	38-19
W	at Notre Dame	31-28
W	KENTUCKY	44-40
	Belk Bowl	
L	vs. Georgia	14-37

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	31.2	50
Rushing	142.7	92
Passing	252.0	46
Total	394.7	69
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	21.8	T-24
Rushing	108.9	10
Passing	199.6	26
Total	308.5	6
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 4	+ 0.31	T-43

NORTH CAROLINA | TAR HEELS

ACC rank: 7 **Record: 6-7** **ACC record: 4-4 (T-3rd, Coastal)** **Stadium: Kenan Stadium (63,000)**

RANKING 37

TAR HEELS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Chapel Hill, N.C.
COACH: Larry Fedora — At North Carolina: 21-17, 3 years; overall: 55-36, 7 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Seth Littrell
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Gene Chizik

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1980
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 16; 9 offense, 6 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Marquise Williams, RB T.J. Logan, RB Elijah Hood, WR Ryan Switzer, WR Mack Hollins, DT Nazair Jones, LB Jeff Schoettmer

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Williams is a senior who was among the most productive quarterbacks in the ACC last season, and there are a lot of others capable of making plays on offense, from Switzer and Hollins at receiver to Logan and Hood in the backfield. The offensive line returns intact but has to take a significant step forward.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The entire defense was a problem last season and it remains to be seen how much improvement is realistic in year one under Chizik. The lack of a pass rush hurt the Tar Heels last year, and pass coverage was often abysmal.

RYAN SWITZER
Photo by AP Photo/Gerry Broome

OFFENSE

Senior quarterback Marquise Williams missed spring practice with a hip injury, but he is expected to be full strength before the start of fall camp. He threw for 3,068 yards and ran for 788 last season.

UNC's running game was at times a mess last fall because of inexperience on the offensive line and in the backfield, but pretty much everyone is back.

If the line improves — and that's the most important question facing the offense — then T.J. Logan and Elijah Hood have the potential to rank among the best running back tandems in the ACC. The Tar Heels also return their top four receivers.

Ryan Switzer caught 61 passes last season, but he didn't excel on special teams after returning five punts for touchdowns during his freshman season. Mack Hollins emerged as one of the ACC's best deep threats last season, and Quinshad Davis and Bug Howard are solid possession receivers.

DEFENSE

The Tar Heels' defense was horrific last season, which is why head coach Larry Fedora parted ways with coordinator Vic Koenning and hired Gene Chizik, who was probably the best available coach for hire.

Chizik faces a monumental rebuilding task. His scheme — a more traditional 4-3 alignment replaces the gimmicky 4-2-5 that Koenning used — should help. The question is: How much improvement is realistic, given how bad this group was last year? The Tar Heels allowed at least 40 points six times.

UNC's pass rush was often non-existent last year, and the defensive line is a question mark entering the preseason. Jeff Schoettmer is a leader at linebacker but, overall, there are a lot of questions at that position group, too.

UNC will be better defensively because it can't possibly be as bad as it was last season — right? — but don't expect Chizik to work miracles in his first season.

> "We're really trying to kind of change the mindset and get them to understand that the game defensively can only be played one way — and physicality is the name of the game."
> — Defensive coordinator Gene Chizik

SPECIAL TEAMS

Switzer remains one of the nation's most respected punt returners because of what he accomplished two years ago. UNC's biggest special teams disappointment last season, though, was an inability to make field goals of longer than 30 yards. Kickers Thomas Moore, a departed senior, and Nick Weiler combined to make 6 of 13 field goal attempts.

OVERVIEW

Fedora has faced significant off-the-field challenges during his tenure — he arrived when UNC was under an NCAA investigation, and then the NCAA reopened that investigation last summer — and so his recruiting efforts have taken a hit. In some ways, then, it's unfair to judge the state of his program.

On the field, though, UNC has gone backward since his arrival, with eight victories in his first season, seven in his second and six last year. If the defense can just be average — which would be a significant improvement — the Tar Heels have enough offensively to win at least eight games and finish near the top of the Coastal Division.

TOP NEWCOMER

DE Jalen Dalton: A heralded prospect from Clemmons, N.C., Dalton was the coup of UNC's recruiting class. He enrolled early and has a head start on learning Gene Chizik's system. Given UNC's defensive deficiencies last season, Dalton should have a chance to make an early contribution.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	12	**Marquise Williams***	6-2	220	Sr.
RB	8	**T.J. Logan***	5-10	185	Jr.
WR	3	**Ryan Switzer***	5-10	185	Jr.
WR	84	Bug Howard	6-5	210	Jr.
WR	14	**Quinshad Davis***	6-4	210	Sr.
TE	81	Kendrick Singleton	6-2	205	Sr.
LT	75	Bentley Spain	6-6	300	So.
LG	70	**Caleb Peterson***	6-5	300	Jr.
C	68	**Lucas Crowley***	6-3	290	Jr.
RG	78	**Landon Turner***	6-4	325	Sr.
RT	71	**Jon Heck***	6-7	300	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	17	**Dajuan Drennon***	6-4	250	So.
DT	90	Nazair Jones	6-5	300	So.
DT	98	**Justin Thomason***	6-4	290	Sr.
DE	43	Jessie Rogers	6-4	270	Sr.
LB	32	Joe Jackson	6-2	225	Jr.
LB	10	**Jeff Schoettmer***	6-2	235	Sr.
LB	42	Shakeel Rashad	6-2	245	Sr.
CB	5	**Brian Walker***	5-11	185	Jr.
CB	2	**Des Lawrence***	6-1	185	Jr.
SS	26	**Dominquie Green***	5-11	190	Jr.
FS	3	Sam Smiley	5-11	190	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	24	**Nick Weiler***	6-0	190	Jr.
P	90	Corbin Daly	6-3	200	Fr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	vs. South Carolina (Charlotte, NC)
Sept. 12	NORTH CAROLINA A&T
Sept. 19	ILLINOIS
Sept. 26	DELAWARE
Oct. 3	at Georgia Tech
Oct. 17	WAKE FOREST
Oct. 24	VIRGINIA
Oct. 29	at Pittsburgh
Nov. 7	DUKE
Nov. 14	MIAMI
Nov. 21	at Virginia Tech
Nov. 28	at NC State

2014 RESULTS

W	LIBERTY	56-29
W	SAN DIEGO STATE	31-27
L	at East Carolina	41-70
L	at Clemson	35-50
L	VIRGINIA TECH	17-34
L	at Notre Dame	43-50
W	GEORGIA TECH	48-43
W	at Virginia	28-27
L	at Miami	20-47
W	PITTSBURGH	40-35
W	at Duke	45-20
L	NC STATE	7-35
	Quick Lane Bowl	
L	vs. Rutgers	21-40

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	33.2	36
Rushing	151.4	81
Passing	278.4	27
Total	429.8	45
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	39.0	T-116
Rushing	240.5	117
Passing	257.4	101
Total	497.8	117
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 0	+ 0.00	T-59

DUKE | BLUE DEVILS

ACC rank: 8 Record: 9-4 ACC record: 5-3 (2nd, Coastal) Stadium: Wallace Wade Stadium (33,941)

RANKING 39

BLUE DEVILS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Durham, N.C.
COACH: David Cutcliffe — At Duke: 40-48, 7 years; overall: 84-77, 13 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Scottie Montgomery
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jim Knowles

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1989, co-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2011
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 5 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Shaquille Powell, WR Johnell Barnes, TE Braxton Deaver, C Matt Skura, LB Kelby Brown, DT Carlos Wray, S Jeremy Cash, S DeVon Edwards

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Duke has a solid stable of running backs, bolstered by Jela Duncan's return from academic suspension. Deaver and Brown are All-ACC talents who received a sixth year of eligibility. The secondary is athletic and experienced. The kicking game is among the ACC's best.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Blue Devils are breaking in a new quarterback, Thomas Sirk, who has yet to start a college game. On defense, Duke loses three of four starters on its defensive line — a position that hasn't traditionally been one of its best anyway.

JEREMY CASH
Photo by Joe Robbins

OFFENSE

Duke has big pieces to replace. Two-year starting quarterback Anthony Boone and wide receiver Jamison Crowder, who caught 283 passes for 3,641 yards and 23 touchdowns in his career, completed their eligibility.

The Blue Devils also lost All-American guard Laken Tomlinson and left tackle Takoby Cofield, a three-year starter.

Redshirt junior Thomas Sirk takes over at quarterback after being used in short-yardage situations last season. Sirk, at a sturdy 6-4, 215 pounds, has good running ability, although his prowess in the passing game has yet to be proven.

Replacing Crowder means chances for other unproven players like junior Johnell Barnes and redshirt freshman Chris Taylor, who had a strong spring and has the speed to be the Blue Devils' top deep threat.

Tight end Braxton Deaver, one of the ACC's best who missed last season with a torn ACL, is back for a sixth season.

Duke's capability in the running game is more promising. Senior Shaquille Powell is a solid runner, and sophomore Shaun Wilson has breakaway speed. More good news is the return of Jela Duncan, who missed last year due to an academic issue. Duncan led Duke in combined rushing yards in 2012 and 2013, his freshman and sophomore seasons.

DEFENSE

Duke's athleticism in the secondary is on par with anyone in the ACC.

The Blue Devils return five defensive backs with starting experience in their 4-2-5 scheme. The best is senior safety Jeremy Cash, an All-ACC player who has 232 tackles in the past two seasons.

Junior DeVon Edwards, who plays at a safety position in Duke's scheme, has intercepted four passes over the last two seasons. The cornerbacks are juniors Breon Borders, who has seven career interceptions, and Bryon Fields, who is adept against the pass and the run.

> "He's in command of what he's doing. He's in command of the offense."
> — David Cutcliffe, on QB Thomas Sirk

Duke will benefit greatly from the return of linebacker Kelby Brown, an All-ACC selection in 2013 when he compiled 114 tackles, including 11 for loss. Brown missed last season with a torn ACL and was granted a sixth season of eligibility.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Duke has, perhaps, the top kicking and punting tandem in the ACC. Senior Ross Martin has missed only four field goal attempts from 39 yards or closer. He's made 4 of 6 attempts from 50 yards or longer.

Redshirt senior punter Will Monday has averaged 43.5 yards per punt and has placed 57 punts inside the 20 in his three seasons.

Edwards is a threat in the kick return game with three touchdowns over the last two years.

OVERVIEW

Losing multiple players to NFL camps is a sign of Duke's growth. The key will be how Duke replaces its departed stars as it seeks a fourth consecutive bowl trip. The Blue Devils' running game will be solid, the defense will be hard to pass against and special teams will be a plus. Sirk's development could be the difference between a good and great season.

TOP NEWCOMER

DE Marquies Price: The true freshman enrolled in January and took part in spring drills. At 6-6, 225 pounds, he has the build to add bulk. But even at that weight, he was effective enough as a speed pass rusher this spring that the coaches believe he can contribute right away.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	1	Thomas Sirk	6-4	215	Jr.
RB	28	**Shaquille Powell***	5-10	205	Sr.
WR	82	Chris Taylor	6-1	170	Fr.
WR	87	**Max McCaffrey***	6-2	195	Sr.
WR	4	Johnell Barnes	6-0	170	Jr.
TE	89	Braxton Deaver	6-5	240	Sr.
LT	76	Gabe Brandner	6-6-	275	So.
LG	67	**Lucas Patrick***	6-4	305	Sr.
C	62	**Matt Skura***	6-4	305	Sr.
RG	65	Cody Robinson	6-3	295	Sr.
RT	71	**Casey Blaser***	6-5	285	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	56	Kyler Brown	6-4	245	Sr.
DT	93	A.J. Wolf	6-4	270	Jr.
DT	98	**Carlos Wray***	6-2	290	Sr.
DE	22	Britton Grier	6-1	245	Sr.
LB	59	Kelby Brown	6-2	230	Sr.
LB	40	Dwayne Norman	6-1	210	Sr.
CB	14	**Bryon Fields***	5-11	180	Jr.
CB	31	**Breon Borders***	6-0	175	Jr.
S	33	**Deondre Singleton***	5-11	180	Jr.
S	16	**Jeremy Cash***	6-2	205	Sr.
S	27	**DeVon Edwards***	5-9	175	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	35	**Ross Martin***	5-10	185	Sr.
P	41	**Will Monday***	6-4	210	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at Tulane
Sept. 12	NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL
Sept. 19	NORTHWESTERN
Sept. 26	GEORGIA TECH
Oct. 3	BOSTON COLLEGE
Oct. 10	at Army
Oct. 24	at Virginia Tech
Oct. 31	MIAMI
Nov. 7	at North Carolina
Nov. 14	PITTSBURGH
Nov. 21	at Virginia
Nov. 28	at Wake Forest

2014 RESULTS

W	ELON	52-13
W	at Troy	34-17
W	KANSAS	41-3
W	TULANE	47-13
L	at Miami	10-22
W	at Georgia Tech	31-25
W	VIRGINIA	20-13
W	at Pittsburgh (2OT)	51-48
W	at Syracuse	27-10
L	VIRGINIA TECH	16-17
L	NORTH CAROLINA	20-45
W	WAKE FOREST	41-21
	Sun Bowl	
L	vs. Arizona State	31-36

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	32.4	40
Rushing	181.8	46
Passing	216.5	77
Total	398.3	66
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	21.8	T-24
Rushing	192.9	92
Passing	206.8	33
Total	399.7	67
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 6	+ 0.46	T-33

PITTSBURGH | PANTHERS

ACC rank: 9 Record: 6-7 ACC record: 4-4 (T-3rd, Coastal) Stadium: Heinz Field (65,050)

RANKING 53

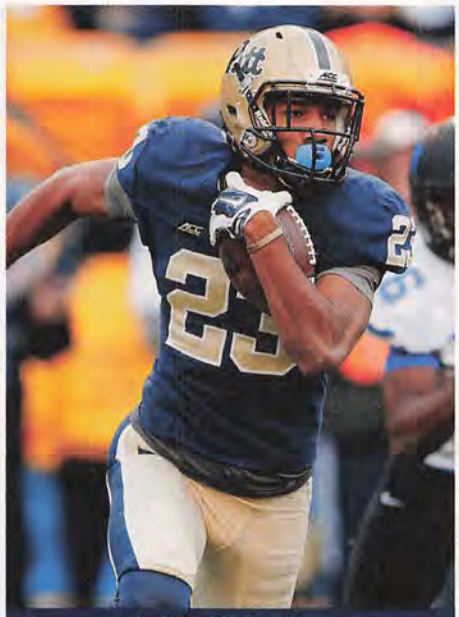
PANTHERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Pittsburgh, Pa.
COACH: Pat Narduzzi — At Pitt and overall, 1st year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jim Chaney
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Josh Conklin

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2010, co-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2007
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 7 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Chad Voytik, RB James Conner, WR Tyler Boyd, OT Adam Bisnowaty, TE J.P. Holtz, CB Lafayette Pitts, NT Khaynin Mosley-Smith, MLB Matt Galambos

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Pitt should not have many issues scoring points with explosive playmakers on the outside and one of the best tailbacks in the country. The offensive line is experienced, and Voytik developed as a passer late last season.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Panthers' defense was not good last year. While the arrival of Narduzzi should help a great deal, there is still not much depth and speed. He'll need time to make Pitt's defense anything like he had at Michigan State.



TYLER BOYD
Photo by Joe Robbins

OFFENSE

First-year coach Pat Narduzzi, known for his defensive prowess, inherits an offense that should be one of the best in the ACC. The Panthers return an experienced quarterback and as much skill position talent as anyone in the conference.

Junior quarterback Chad Voytik looks to build on a solid first season as the starter, when he completed 176 of 287 passes for 2,233 yards, with 16 touchdown passes and seven interceptions.

Voytik is also a good runner, but the running game is already in good hands with junior James Conner, a 6-2, 250-pounder with a great combination of power and speed.

Conner was named the ACC Player of the Year last season after rushing 298 times for 1,765 yards (5.9 per carry). His 26 touchdowns broke Tony Dorsett's single-season school record.

With Conner powering the offense, the Panthers averaged 249.5 yards rushing, the nation's 15th-best rushing attack. The passing game is potent, too, thanks to All-American receiver Tyler Boyd, who caught 78 passes for 1,261 yards and eight touchdowns last season. Pitt has a host of younger receivers, as well as two pass-catching tight ends — J.P Holtz and Scott Orndoff.

Three starters return along the offensive line, and there are plenty of other good options as former coach Paul Chryst made rebuilding this unit a recruiting priority.

DEFENSE

The defense was bad last season, particularly in the second half of the season. Four of the final six opponents scored 30 or more points against the Panthers — including two teams that scored more than 50.

But Narduzzi brings a more aggressive scheme that will prioritize making big, game-changing plays.

Three seniors anchor the defensive line and that group is led by nose tackle Khaynin Mosley-Smith, who is more than just a run stopper. He is an agile 310 pounds and a disruptive force in the middle.

Sophomore defensive end Rori Blair led the team with five sacks last season and heavy-hitting outside linebacker Bam Bradley should thrive in Narduzzi's scheme as well.

The secondary features heady safety Reggie Mitchell, as well as physical corners Lafayette Pitts and Avonte Maddox, who both looked good in this scheme in the spring.

> "I'm not sure entirely, but I figure we will throw it to the tall, skinny kid and hand it off a bunch to that big son of a gun in the backfield."
>
> — Offensive coordinator Jim Chaney

SPECIAL TEAMS

Junior place-kicker Chris Blewitt made 16 of 21 field goal attempts last season, and sophomore punter Ryan Winslow averaged 40.1 yards per attempt. Boyd's flair for the big play makes him a dangerous kick and punt returner.

OVERVIEW

The arrival of Narduzzi has created plenty of buzz, but the Panthers are probably still a couple of recruiting classes away from being a legitimate contender for the ACC title. However, the offense should be explosive enough for Pitt to be an intriguing team to watch. Certainly, a winning record and an eighth consecutive trip to a bowl game should be expected, but anything more is a bonus.

TOP NEWCOMER

CB Jordan Whitehead: He was the No. 1 prospect in Pennsylvania in the class of 2015, according to 247Sports. He scored 35 touchdowns — via the rush, catch, interception return, punt return and kick return — as a senior at Central Valley High School. He'll compete for early playing time.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	16	**Chad Voytik***	6-1	205	Jr.
RB	24	**James Conner***	6-2	250	Jr.
FB	31	**Jaymar Parrish***	6-2	270	Jr.
WR	23	**Tyler Boyd***	6-2	190	Jr.
WR	19	Dontez Ford	6-2	205	Jr.
TE	86	**J.P. Holtz***	6-4	245	Sr.
LT	69	**Adam Bisnowaty***	6-6	305	Jr.
LG	53	**Dorian Johnson***	6-5	300	Jr.
C	57	Artie Rowell	6-2	315	Sr.
RG	78	Alex Bookser	6-6	295	Fr.
RT	75	Jaryd Jones-Smith	6-7	335	So.

DEFENSE

DE	92	Rori Blair	6-4	230	So.
DT	91	**Darryl Render***	6-2	275	Sr.
NT	95	**Khaynin Mosley-Smith***	6-0	310	Sr.
DE	5	Ejuan Price	6-0	255	Sr.
LB	3	Nicholas Grigsby	6-1	220	Sr.
LB	47	**Matt Galambos***	6-2	245	Jr.
LB	4	Bam Bradley	6-2	230	Jr.
CB	14	Avonte Maddox	5-9	165	So.
CB	6	**Lafayette Pitts***	5-11	195	Sr.
SS	25	Pat Amara	6-2	190	So.
FS	15	**Reggie Mitchell***	6-0	185	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	12	**Chris Blewitt***	5-9	185	Jr.
P	18	**Ryan Winslow***	6-5	210	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	YOUNGSTOWN STATE
Sept. 12	at Akron
Sept. 19	at Iowa
Oct. 3	at Virginia Tech
Oct. 10	VIRGINIA
Oct. 17	at Georgia Tech
Oct. 24	at Syracuse
Oct. 29	NORTH CAROLINA
Nov. 7	NOTRE DAME
Nov. 14	at Duke
Nov. 21	LOUISVILLE
Nov. 27	MIAMI

2014 RESULTS

W	DELAWARE	62-0
W	at Boston College	30-20
W	at FIU	42-25
L	IOWA	20-24
L	AKRON	10-21
L	at Virginia	19-24
W	VIRGINIA TECH	21-16
L	GEORGIA TECH	28-56
L	DUKE (2OT)	48-51
L	at North Carolina	35-40
W	SYRACUSE	30-7
W	at Miami	35-23
	Armed Forces Bowl	
L	vs. Houston	34-35

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	31.8	43
Rushing	249.5	15
Passing	185.9	102
Total	435.4	40
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	26.3	58
Rushing	160.8	55
Passing	198.9	24
Total	359.8	33
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 5	- 0.38	T-95

MIAMI | HURRICANES

ACC rank: 10 Record: 6-7 ACC record: 3-5 (T-5th, Coastal) Stadium: Sun Life Stadium (74,916)

RANKING **54**

HURRICANES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Coral Gables, Fla.
COACH: Al Golden — At Miami: 28-22, 4 years; overall: 55-56, 9 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: James Coley
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mark D'Onofrio

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2003, Big East co-champions
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 11; 4 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Brad Kaaya, RB Joe Yearby, OG Daniel Isidora, LB Raphael Kirby, LB Tyriq McCord, DE Chad Thomas, S Deon Bush

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Kaaya should continue to progress at quarterback, provided he gets enough protection. The secondary should get more interceptions because of active corners and safeties, as well as an improved pass rush. Talented young players include RB Mark Walton and LB Charles Perry.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Miami loses 111 career starts with the departure of LT Ereck Flowers, LG Jon Feliciano and C Shane McDermott. The return of RT Kc McDermott from a torn medial collateral ligament is crucial. There also are depth issues at linebacker, where Denzel Perryman isn't around to clean up everyone else's mistakes.

BRAD KAAYA
Photo by Joe Robbins

OFFENSE

Quarterback Brad Kaaya is coming off a season in which he earned ACC Rookie of the Year honors, but tailback Duke Johnson and wide receiver Phillip Dorsett were NFL draft picks and the offensive line lost three starters, including No. 9 overall pick Ereck Flowers.

So, the outlook for 2015 is iffy.

Kaaya was superb last season, when he started every game as a true freshman, throwing for 3,198 yards, with 26 touchdowns and 12 interceptions. Coaches noted he was more settled in the pocket this spring and that his leadership qualities had emerged.

Coordinator James Coley, meanwhile, said he was disappointed in the offensive line, hinting that incoming players could push for playing time. Right guard Daniel Isidora has the most experience.

Joe Yearby, suspended for the spring game, will share carries with freshman Mark Walton and senior Gus Edwards, a 230-pound bruiser chosen the top offensive performer in the spring.

Stacy Coley is a good bet to be the breakout receiver. He's considered one of the team's hardest workers.

DEFENSE

Miami ranked No. 14 in total defense last season and ranked high in yards per play and fewest explosive plays allowed. But coordinator Mark D'Onofrio's schemes have come under fire, and the defense had trouble getting off the field in losses to Nebraska, Georgia Tech, Virginia and Pittsburgh.

The Hurricanes also ranked 97th in tackles for loss.

The biggest concern, by far, is at linebacker, where tackling machine Denzel Perryman is off to the NFL.

Jermaine Grace is undersized (6-1, 208), but he made a lot of plays in the spring, and D'Onofrio said "he's got all the ability in the world." Raphael Kirby showed some playmaking ability last season, but his overall play was suspect. He'll be asked to take Perryman's place.

Miami's defensive linemen have matured and its secondary has built depth.

Defensive end Al-Quadin Muhammad is coming back from a semester suspension and is 15 pounds heavier. Defensive tackles Calvin Heurtelou and Ufomba Kamalu are seniors. Sophomore Chad Thomas may be ready to blossom; the same goes for Jelani Hamilton, who earned most improved defensive player honors this spring.

Senior corner Tracy Howard and senior safeties Deon Bush and Dallas Crawford lead a deep secondary that made a lot of picks in spring scrimmages.

> "There's a difference between being a quarterback and a quarterback who's a leader. He's the leader."
>
> — Coach Al Golden, on QB Brad Kaaya

SPECIAL TEAMS

Mike Badgley was 14 of 18 on field goal attempts last season, and he hit a lot of 50-yarders this spring. Miami is often able to use its speed on punt and kick returns, but that unit had little pop last season. Maybe Walton or Jaquan Johnson can help Stacy Coley in those areas.

OVERVIEW

Considering how much NFL talent Miami had — seven players were drafted (five in the first three rounds) — the Hurricanes were one of the nation's most underachieving teams last season. Still, that talent has to be replaced. Even with Kaaya, it looks like this could be another year of hovering around .500.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Mark Walton: Walton, a four-star recruit, chose Miami over Auburn, Florida State, Tennessee and South Carolina. He ran for 184 yards and three TDs, also scoring twice on receptions, to help Miami's Booker T. Washington High win the state title game.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	15	Brad Kaaya*	6-4	209	So.
RB	2	Joe Yearby	5-9	195	So.
WR	11	Rashawn Scott	6-2	205	Sr.
WR	3	Stacy Coley	6-1	187	Jr.
WR	8	Braxton Berrios	5-9	183	So.
TE	5	Standish Dobard	6-4	262	Jr.
LT	73	Trevor Darling*	6-5	318	So.
LG	76	Taylor Gadbois	6-8	321	Jr.
C	68	Nick Linder	6-3	300	So.
RG	63	Daniel Isidora*	6-4	322	Jr.
RT	52	Kc McDermott	6-6	315	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	8	Al-Quadin Muhammad	6-3	260	So.
DT	93	Calvin Heurtelou*	6-3	315	Sr.
DT	47	Ufomba Kamalu	6-6	295	Sr.
DE	9	Chad Thomas	6-5	265	So.
LB	5	Jermaine Grace	6-1	208	Jr.
LB	56	Raphael Kirby*	6-1	235	Sr.
LB	17	Tyriq McCord*	6-3	236	Sr.
CB	1	Artie Burns*	6-0	193	Jr.
CB	3	Tracy Howard	5-11	191	Sr.
SS	6	Jamal Carter	6-1	209	Jr.
FS	2	Deon Bush*	6-1	205	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	15	Mike Badgley*	5-10	180	So.
P	16	Justin Vogel*	6-4	208	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	BETHUNE-COOKMAN
Sept. 11	at FAU
Sept. 19	NEBRASKA
Oct. 1	at Cincinnati
Oct. 10	at Florida State
Oct. 17	VIRGINIA TECH
Oct. 24	CLEMSON
Oct. 31	at Duke
Nov. 7	VIRGINIA
Nov. 14	at North Carolina
Nov. 21	GEORGIA TECH
Nov. 27	at Pittsburgh

2014 RESULTS

L	at Louisville	13-31
W	FLORIDA A&M	41-7
W	ARKANSAS STATE	41-20
L	at Nebraska	31-41
W	DUKE	22-10
L	at Georgia Tech	17-28
W	CINCINNATI	55-34
W	at Virginia Tech	30-6
W	NORTH CAROLINA	47-20
L	FLORIDA STATE	26-30
L	at Virginia	13-30
L	PITTSBURGH	23-35
	Independence Bowl	
L	vs. South Carolina	21-24

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	29.2	59
Rushing	180.4	48
Passing	249.9	47
Total	430.3	44
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.3	36
Rushing	137.1	30
Passing	192.5	17
Total	329.6	14
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 1	- 0.08	66

BOSTON COLLEGE | EAGLES

ACC rank: 11 Record: 7-6 ACC record: 4-4 (4th, Atlantic) Stadium: Alumni Stadium (44,500)

RANKING 57

EAGLES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Chestnut Hill, Mass.
COACH: Steve Addazio — At Boston College: 14-12, 2 years; overall: 27-23-4 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Todd Fitch
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Don Brown

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2004, Big East co-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 9; 2 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Darius Wade, RB Jon Hilliman, RB Myles Willis, WR Sherman Alston, RG Harris Williams, DT Truman Gutapfel, DE Kevin Kavalec

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Boston College has an impressive array of running backs that can beat foes in a variety of ways. Hilliman is a physical back who continues to get stronger; Willis and Marcus Outlow are solid backs with decent hands; Tyler Rouse also plans to get some touches. That stable of backs is important for a run-heavy team.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: BC lacks experience at key positions, especially the offensive line, which definitely doesn't have the veteran vibe it has had in past seasons. The secondary is filled with question marks.

CONNOR WUJCIAK
Photo by Tomasso DeRosa

OFFENSE

Darius Wade has the lead to be Boston College's new quarterback, but coach Steve Addazio will let true freshman Elijah Robinson and sophomore Troy Flutie (Doug's nephew) compete into fall camp. Wade saw limited action last season behind Tyler Murphy, throwing eight passes, but it does give him a little edge in experience.

Boston College will have many weapons in the backfield, anchored by sophomore Jon Hilliman (860 rushing yards, 13 TDs), and supported by junior Myles Willis (459 yards) and sophomore Marcus Outlow (243 yards).

The only returning receiver of note is Sherman Alston, a lightning fast, yet undersized, sophomore who made 16 catches last season.

Also coming back will be receiver Bobby Swigert, who hasn't played a down since 2012 after he tore up his knee against Notre Dame. He has had 11 surgeries on his knee since the initial injury. Junior wideout Harrison Jackson, who had a couple of starts in 2013, will be returning from an injury that sidelined him last season.

The offensive line is going to be almost completely revamped. Harris Williams, a graduate student, returns to the Heights after losing 2014 to a knee injury in Week 1. He was expected to be one of the best linemen on the team last year.

DEFENSE

Boston College should have one of the most talented front sevens in the ACC.

Connor Wujciak and Truman Gutapfel give the Eagles two massive tackles. They were fantastic against the run in 2014, helping BC finish second in the country in rushing defense. They will be joined by senior Mehdi Abdesmad, who has shown glimpses of excellence up the middle, but has battled season-ending injuries over the past two years.

Kevin Kavalec and Malachi Moore could be two of the better defensive ends BC has seen in years. Coordinator Don Brown's defensive scheme is blitz heavy, which resulted in BC finishing 35th in the country in sacks. Watch for sophomore defensive end Harold Landry, a four-star recruit, to have a breakout season.

> "He's starting to get a good handle on the offense. He throws the ball extremely well. He's very deceptive. He has outstanding quickness and athletic ability."
> — Steve Addazio, on QB Darius Wade

At linebacker, sophomores Connor Strachan and Kevin Bletzer could take a big step forward this season. Steven Daniels and Tim Joy are upperclassmen who are solid against the run.

In the secondary, Boston College will be relying on senior Justin Simmons to be a physical presence at safety or cornerback.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Mike Knoll should still be the main place-kicker, and the Eagles are hoping for consistency after three kickers combined to miss eight PATs last season. Senior Alex Howell returns after averaging 42.5 yards per punt last season. He could challenge Knoll for the kicking job as well.

OVERVIEW

Boston College faces plenty of questions, but Addazio has proven adept at maximizing his talent and overhauling his offensive game plan to tailor his talent. It looks like he will have to do that again in Year 3 with a dual-threat quarterback who is more of a threat with his arm than his legs.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Nolan Borgersen: Boston College's depth chart at WR has holes in it, and no freshman is ready to make an impact like the 6-3 Borgersen. He set New Jersey state high school records for career catches, receiving yards and touchdowns. He enrolled early and practiced this spring.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	4	Darius Wade	6-0	201	So.
RB	**32**	**Jon Hilliman***	**6-0**	**215**	**So.**
RB	23	Myles Willis	5-9	203	Jr.
WR	85	Thadd Smith	5-9	167	So.
WR	6	Sherman Alston	5-6	163	So.
TE	**88**	**Mike Giacone***	**6-5**	**262**	**Sr.**
LT	74	Dave Bowen	6-7	291	Sr.
LG	77	Jon Baker	6-3	281	So.
C	50	Frank Taylor	6-3	297	Sr.
RG	64	Harris Williams	6-3	299	Sr.
RT	72	Jim Cashman	6-7	301	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	**93**	**Kevin Kavalec***	**6-2**	**256**	**Jr.**
DT	**97**	**Truman Gutapfel***	**6-3**	**289**	**Jr.**
DT	**90**	**Connor Wujciak***	**6-3**	**304**	**Sr.**
DE	87	Malachi Moore	6-7	274	Sr.
LB	28	Matt Milano	6-1	220	Jr.
LB	**52**	**Steven Daniels***	**6-0**	**257**	**Sr.**
LB	13	Connor Strachan	6-2	231	So.
CB	43	John Johnson	6-0	194	Jr.
CB	**27**	**Justin Simmons***	**6-3**	**198**	**Sr.**
SS	47	Cam Seward	6-0	219	So.
FS	17	Christian Lezzer	6-0	210	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**98**	**Mike Knoll***	**6-1**	**214**	**So.**
P	**42**	**Alex Howell***	**6-5**	**206**	**Sr.**

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	MAINE
Sept. 12	HOWARD
Sept. 18	FLORIDA STATE
Sept. 26	NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Oct. 3	at Duke
Oct. 10	WAKE FOREST
Oct. 17	at Clemson
Oct. 24	at Louisville
Oct. 31	VIRGINIA TECH
Nov. 7	NC STATE
Nov. 21	vs. Notre Dame (Fenway Park)
Nov. 28	at Syracuse

2014 RESULTS

W	at Massachusetts	30-7
L	PITTSBURGH	20-30
W	USC	37-31
W	MAINE	40-10
L	COLORADO STATE	21-24
W	at NC State	30-14
L	CLEMSON	13-17
W	at Wake Forest	23-17
W	at Virginia Tech	33-31
L	LOUISVILLE	19-38
L	at Florida State	17-20
W	SYRACUSE	28-7
	Pinstripe Bowl	
L	vs. Penn State (OT)	30-31

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	26.2	83
Rushing	254.7	14
Passing	129.3	122
Total	384.0	80
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	21.3	21
Rushing	94.5	2
Passing	229.8	66
Total	324.3	11
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+1	+0.08	57

VIRGINIA | CAVALIERS

ACC rank: 12 Record: 5-7 ACC record: 3-5 (T-5th, Coastal) Stadium: Scott Stadium (61,500)

RANKING 63

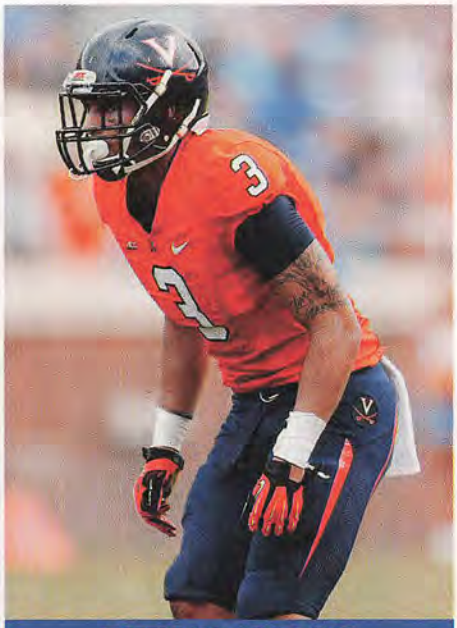
CAVALIERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Charlottesville, Va.
COACH: Mike London — At Virginia: 23-38, 5 years; overall: 47-43, 7 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Steve Fairchild
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jon Tenuta

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1995
LAST BOWL: 2011, Peach
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 5 offense, 6 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Matt Johns, RB Taquan Mizzell, WR T.J. Thorpe, WR Canaan Severin, DE Mike Moore, DT Donte Wilkins, CB Maurice Canady, S Quin Blanding

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Virginia's offensive line is deep and experienced, which should help quarterbacks Johns and Greyson Lambert find an experienced receiving corps. The Cavaliers are experienced on the defensive line and in the secondary.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: London is determined to feature a power running game, but the running backs haven't proven they're capable. Both quarterbacks struggled with consistency and accuracy last season. The entire starting linebacking corps is gone, and questions abound about where the pass rush will come from for the Cavs.



QUIN BLANDING
Photo by Joe Robbins

OFFENSE

Virginia lacked explosiveness last season when it finished among the lower echelon of FBS teams in rushing, total offense and scoring, in addition to struggling in the red zone.

Enter North Carolina transfer T.J. Thorpe, a dynamic wide receiver and record-breaking kick returner, who will finish his final year of eligibility with the Cavaliers. Thorpe adds speed and the ability to turn small gains into game-breaking plays, something missing from UVa's offense for quite some time. He had 42 career receptions at UNC.

Coach Mike London also brought in Wisconsin assistant coach Chris Beatty to work with UVa's running backs and help add some punch to coordinator Steve Fairchild's attack. London elevated former backup Matt Johns, a more mobile quarterback, into the starting job over Greyson Lambert coming out of the spring.

Virginia still plans to feature a power rushing attack with small tailbacks like junior Taquan Mizzell (5-10, 190) running behind a deep and experienced line. Virginia fans are still waiting for Mizell, a former five-star recruit, to live up to his nickname, "Smoke," for being able to elude would-be tacklers.

DEFENSE

Coordinator Jon Tenuta's defense is as aggressive as they come, and a great deal of Virginia's early success last season was due to takeaways and sacks.

Much of that production went out the window when five starters departed, including the entire linebacker corps and two early entrees into the NFL Draft — end Eli Harold (third round, San Francisco) and outside linebacker Max Valles (sixth round, Oakland).

UVa will be tough to run against with a big and deep front, featuring senior end Mike Moore and tackles David Dean, Donte Wilkins and Andrew Brown.

The secondary has experience at the corners with seniors Maurice Canady and Demetrious Nicholson (coming back after injury), and junior Tim Harris, but opposing passers picked on those corners last season. The secondary is bolstered by sophomore free safety Quin Blanding, who seems destined to become the Cavaliers' next great defensive star and potential All-American.

> "Last year we got away from play-action and became too finessed. We're trying to get as explosive as we can."
> — Offensive coordinator Steve Fairchild

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Cavaliers boast one of the nation's top placekickers in Ian Frye, a Lou Groza Award semifinalist last season and second-team All-ACC selection. Frye was good on 22 of 27 field goal attempts last season, three of those misses from more than 50 yards.

UVa will break in a new punter, likely junior Nicholas Conte, who has a strong leg, but lacks consistency.

OVERVIEW

London is counting on experienced quarterbacks, a deep offensive line, and the playmaking ability of Thorpe to provide more scoring. Meanwhile, London is hoping Tenuta's aggressive defensive approach can continue to create havoc on opposing passers. Virginia must overcome a challenging start to the season, with three of its first four games against UCLA, Notre Dame and Boise State, before taking on a difficult ACC schedule as the Cavs try to get back to a bowl game.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB C.J. Stalker: After enrolling in January, the true freshman entered spring practice ranked No.1 on the depth chart at weakside linebacker. Stalker missed part of the spring with a lower body injury, but he impressed the coaches enough that he'll have a chance to start in UVa's season opener at UCLA.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	15	Matt Johns	6-5	210	Jr.
RB	4	Taquan Mizzell	5-10	200	Jr.
FB	41	Connor Wingo-Reeves	6-3	235	Jr.
WR	8	T.J. Thorpe	6-0	210	Sr.
WR	**9**	**Canaan Severin***	**6-2**	**215**	**Sr.**
TE	89	Rob Burns	6-7	260	Sr.
LT	75	Sadiq Olanrewaju	6-6	290	Jr.
LG	63	Ryan Doull	6-5	300	Jr.
C	**50**	**Jackson Matteo***	**6-5**	**290**	**Jr.**
RG	**65**	**Ross Burbank***	**6-4**	**300**	**Sr.**
RT	**72**	**Eric Smith***	**6-5**	**305**	**Jr.**

DEFENSE

DE	34	Kwontie Moore	6-2	290	Sr.
DT	**55**	**David Dean***	**6-1**	**295**	**Sr.**
DT	**93**	**Donte Wilkins***	**6-1**	**300**	**Jr.**
DE	**32**	**Mike Moore***	**6-4**	**275**	**Sr.**
LB	59	Mark Hall	6-2	240	Jr.
LB	53	Micah Kiser	6-2	245	So.
LB	51	Zach Bradshaw	6-3	230	Jr.
CB	**26**	**Maurice Canady***	**6-2**	**185**	**Sr.**
CB	**5**	**Tim Harris***	**6-2**	**200**	**Jr.**
SS	38	Kelvin Rainey	6-1	200	Jr.
FS	**3**	**Quin Blanding***	**6-1**	**215**	**So.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	14	Ian Frye*	6-6	215	Sr.
P	38	Nicholas Conte	6-3	225	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at UCLA
Sept. 12	NOTRE DAME
Sept. 19	WILLIAM & MARY
Sept. 25	BOISE STATE
Oct. 10	at Pittsburgh
Oct. 17	SYRACUSE
Oct. 24	at North Carolina
Oct. 31	GEORGIA TECH
Nov. 7	at Miami
Nov. 14	at Louisville
Nov. 21	DUKE
Nov. 28	VIRGINIA TECH

2014 RESULTS

L	UCLA	20-28
W	RICHMOND	45-13
W	LOUISVILLE	23-21
L	at BYU	33-41
W	KENT STATE	45-13
W	PITTSBURGH	24-19
L	at Duke	13-20
L	NORTH CAROLINA	27-28
L	at Georgia Tech	10-35
L	at Florida State	20-34
W	MIAMI	30-13
L	at Virginia Tech	20-24

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	25.8	85
Rushing	137.8	97
Passing	236.4	57
Total	374.2	87
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.1	32
Rushing	120.7	18
Passing	232.5	72
Total	353.2	28
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 5	+ 0.42	36

SYRACUSE | ORANGE

ACC rank: 13 Record: 3-9 ACC record: 1-7 (T-6th, Atlantic) Stadium: Carrier Dome (49,250)

RANKING 73

ORANGE at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Syracuse, N.Y.
COACH: Scott Shafer — At Syracuse and overall: 10-15, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tim Lester
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Chuck Bullough

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2004, co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2013, Texas
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 7 offense, 3 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Terrel Hunt, WR Steve Ishmael, C Rob Trudo, HB Ashton Broyld, HB Ervin Philips, DE Ron Thompson, MLB Zaire Franklin, P Riley Dixon

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Orange returns most of its playmakers on offense and is hoping to maximize its talent by moving Broyld and Philips to the hybrid back positions. SU also features experience on the offensive line.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The margin for error is razor thin across the board. Another rash of injuries like last season to the offensive line or skill-position players, and production will be crippled. SU running backs rushed for only two TDs last season — none after the season-opener.

OFFENSE

After running a gun-read offense for the last two years, coordinator Tim Lester installed an attack that is expected to feature more downhill running and versatile personnel groupings.

A unit that was among the worst in the country at scoring touchdowns — the Orange crossed the goal line on just 8.4 percent of its possessions last season — will look to utilize some of its best athletes at the hybrid back position, with that player lining up on the wing, in the slot and in the backfield.

Senior quarterback Terrel Hunt, who is fully recovered after fracturing his fibula five games into the 2014 season, is focusing on becoming more of a pocket passer. The key to that plan, it would seem, is maintaining a healthy line. SU rarely repeated a starting lineup from week to week last season.

The Orange brings back experience in the trenches in redshirt seniors Rob Trudo, Ivan Foy and Nick Robinson, but all have injury histories.

Sophomore speedster Ervin Philips is shifting from running back to hybrid back, where he will join senior Ashton Broyld, who has played every other offensive skill position at SU.

Steve Ishmael returns as the team's best receiving threat after hauling in 27 passes for 415 yards and three touchdowns as a true freshman. In the backfield, Devante McFarlane and George Morris II will look to hold off a talented group of incoming freshmen.

DEFENSE

Syracuse will replace seven of its eight leading tacklers from last season. There is only one experienced player up front — Ron Thompson, who will be sliding back to defensive end after playing out of position at tackle last season. He recorded 32 tackles, including seven for loss, and three sacks.

At the other defensive end position, senior Donnie Simmons and redshirt junior Luke Arciniega, a converted linebacker, are two options. Inside, the Orange returns two seniors with injury histories in John Raymon and Wayne Williams, plus sophomore Kayton Samuels and redshirt freshman Chris Slayton.

STEVE ISHMAEL
Photo by Brian Westerholt/Four Seam Images via AP Images

"I love it. It creates mismatches all over and will put the defense in binds."
— QB Terrel Hunt, on the team's new hybrid back position

Syracuse lost two starting linebackers, so junior Marqez Hodge slides from the middle to the weakside, while sophomore Zaire Franklin takes over at Mike. Franklin racked up 44 tackles as a true freshman.

The Orange loses three starters in the secondary and all of its rotational safeties. Senior cornerback Julian Whigham brings the most experience, but he was the weak point in the group last season.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior punter Riley Dixon is one of the best in the ACC, averaging 42.4 yards per attempt last season. Sophomore walk-on Cole Murphy will look to hold onto the job he won as a true freshman. Murphy made 13 of 16 field goal attempts last season, including a pair of 50-yarders.

OVERVIEW

Syracuse has many moving parts heading into a crucial season for third-year head coach Scott Shafer. With a new offensive system and unproven cast of defensive personnel, the Orange will have to work quickly to bounce back from a disappointing 2014 season.

TOP NEWCOMER

DE Jake Pickard: He flipped his commitment from Wisconsin to Syracuse near Signing Day, giving the Orange potential help on a depleted defensive line. Pickard, from Millburn (N.J.) High School, and DL Steven Clark could be called on for immediate playing time.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	10	**Terrel Hunt***	6-3	234	Sr.
RB	29	Devante McFarlane	6-0	198	Jr.
HB	14	Ervin Philips	5-11	179	So.
WR	8	Steve Ishmael	6-2	184	So.
WR	82	Alvin Cornelius	6-1	193	Jr.
TE	89	**Josh Parris***	6-4	245	Jr.
LT	72	**Ivan Foy***	6-5	192	Sr.
LG	68	**Nick Robinson***	6-6	279	Sr.
C	55	**Rob Trudo***	6-4	300	Sr.
RG	59	Aaron Roberts	6-4	285	Fr.
RT	57	**Omari Palmer***	6-3	303	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	13	**Ron Thompson***	6-4	257	Jr.
DT	50	John Raymon	6-5	325	Sr.
DT	97	Kayton Samuels	6-0	319	So.
DE	51	Donnie Simmons	6-2	248	Sr.
LB	33	**Marqez Hodge***	5-11	218	Jr.
LB	45	Zaire Franklin	6-0	238	So.
LB	30	Parris Bennett	6-0	223	So.
CB	1	**Julian Whigham***	6-1	185	Sr.
CB	2	Wayne Morgan	5-11	198	Jr.
SS	28	Antwan Cordy	5-8	169	So.
S	16	Rodney Williams	5-10	187	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	48	**Cole Murphy***	6-3	193	So.
P	92	**Riley Dixon***	6-5	221	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	RHODE ISLAND
Sept. 12	WAKE FOREST
Sept. 19	CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Sept. 26	LSU
Oct. 10	at South Florida
Oct. 17	at Virginia
Oct. 24	PITTSBURGH
Oct. 31	at Florida State
Nov. 7	at Louisville
Nov. 14	CLEMSON
Nov. 21	at NC State
Nov. 28	BOSTON COLLEGE

2014 RESULTS

W	VILLANOVA (2OT)	27-26
W	at Central Michigan	40-3
L	MARYLAND	20-34
L	vs. Notre Dame	15-31
L	LOUISVILLE	6-28
L	FLORIDA STATE	20-38
W	at Wake Forest	30-7
L	at Clemson	6-16
L	NC STATE	17-24
L	DUKE	10-27
L	at Pittsburgh	7-30
L	at Boston College	7-28

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	17.1	T-118
Rushing	145.8	90
Passing	184.1	103
Total	329.9	113
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.3	37
Rushing	139.3	31
Passing	209.9	38
Total	349.2	26
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 1	- 0.08	T-69

WAKE FOREST | DEMON DEACONS

ACC rank: 14 | Record: 3-9 | ACC record: 1-7 (T-6th, Atlantic) | Stadium: BB&T Field (31,500)

RANKING 78

DEMON DEACONS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Winston-Salem, N.C.
COACH: Dave Clawson — At Wake Forest: 3-9, 1 year; overall: 93-89, 15 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Warren Ruggiero
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Elko

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2006
LAST BOWL: 2011, Music City
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 6 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB John Wolford, TE Cam Serigne, NT Tylor Harris, LB Brandon Chubb, LB Marquel Lee, S Ryan Janvion

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Wake Forest likes its front seven on defense, with six returning starters, including Harris and Chubb. Janvion is a leader on defense. More skill position help is on the way via the 2015 recruiting class.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The loss of two outstanding corners, Merrill Noel and Kevin Johnson, is not something the Deacons can easily overcome. The offense has a long way to go after averaging only 216.3 yards per game, the worst mark in the nation. And now the offensive line figures to have three redshirt freshman starters.

JOHN WOLFORD
Photo by Brian Tirpak

OFFENSE

Coach Dave Clawson's second team will be younger than his first, but there is more talent this time around.

Offensive line improvement has been one of the Demon Deacons' major tasks, and Clawson feels better about that unit, which is anchored by senior captain Dylan Intemann, a 6-5, 305-pound guard. He is joined by junior guard Josh Harris and three promising redshirt freshmen.

It helps that John Wolford, who threw for 2,037 yards and 12 touchdowns as a true freshman, returns to lead the offense, although that offense was last nationally in yards per game. The Deacons need more playmakers around him, and a couple began to emerge in the spring at receiver — true freshman Tabari Hines and redshirt freshman Cortez Lewis.

Tight end Cam Serigne, a redshirt sophomore, led the team with 54 catches for 531 yards and five touchdowns, and was the nation's top receiving tight end in 2014.

Flanker Jared Crump also returns, along with tailback Isaiah Robinson, a strong inside runner who had 174 yards and three touchdowns as part of a limited rotation.

DEFENSE

For Wake Forest, it's the front seven that counts.

Six starters return from that group, including outside linebacker Brandon Chubb and nose tackle Tylor Harris. Chubb is a two-time team captain and was second on the team with 109 tackles in 2014. Harris, in addition to being a force at nose tackle, led the nation last year in blocked kicks with three.

Marquel Lee, a junior middle linebacker, had 101 tackles last season, including four sacks. Josh Banks, a redshirt sophomore defensive tackle, also had four sacks last season.

Clawson hopes the strength up front will help soften the blow of losing elite cornerbacks Merrill Noel and Kevin Johnson, the latter of whom was picked No. 16 overall by Houston in the NFL Draft.

There is still talent in the secondary, led by strong safety Ryan Janvion. A two-time team captain, Janvion led the team last season with 115 tackles.

Promising junior Brad Watson, who missed most of the spring with a wrist injury, will man one of the corner spots, with redshirt freshman Josh Okonye on the other side.

> "Are we ripping off 12-, 15-, and 20-yard runs? No, but everything's getting back to the line of scrimmage and getting positive yards."
>
> — Dave Clawson, on the spring running game

SPECIAL TEAMS

Sophomore kicker Mike Weaver made his first 10 field goal attempts and converted 15 of 19 tries for the season. Senior punter Alex Kinal averaged an impressive 43.6 yards. He was one of three punters in the country who didn't have a touchback.

OVERVIEW

The front seven on defense will lead the way, but the offense must get in gear if the Deacons are to better last year's 3-9 record. Wolford did an admirable job as a true freshman quarterback, and Clawson likes the talent on the offensive line, although three starters are redshirt freshmen. It's all part of a youth movement that is still going to have growing pains in Clawson's second season.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Tabari` Hines: The true freshman enrolled in January and made a big impression, including catching a 25-yard TD pass in the spring game. The speedy receiver has the potential to be a playmaker Wake Forest desperately needs, including in the return game.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	10	**John Wolford***	6-1	205	So.
RB	21	**Isaiah Robinson***	5-10	215	So.
WR	81	Cortez Lewis	6-1	200	Fr.
WR	8	Tabari Hines	5-10	165	Fr.
FL	88	**Jared Crump***	6-3	205	So.
TE	85	**Cam Serigne***	6-3	245	So.
LT	74	Phil Haynes	6-4	280	Fr.
LG	65	**Josh Harris***	6-4	310	Jr.
C	70	Ryan Anderson	6-6	290	Fr.
RG	63	**Dylan Intemann***	6-5	305	Sr.
RT	75	Justin Herron	6-5	290	Fr.
DEFENSE					
DE	53	Duke Ejiofor	6-4	275	So.
NT	36	**Tylor Harris***	6-4	305	Sr.
DT	40	**Josh Banks***	6-4	275	So.
DE	14	**Wendell Dunn***	6-3	250	So.
LB	48	**Brandon Chubb***	6-1	245	Sr.
LB	8	**Marquel Lee***	6-3	235	Jr.
LB	30	**Hunter Williams***	6-0	220	Sr.
CB	25	Brad Watson	6-0	190	Jr.
CB	24	Josh Okonye	6-0	200	So.
SS	22	**Ryan Janvion***	5-11	190	Jr.
FS	26	Thomas Brown	6-3	220	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	18	**Mike Weaver***	6-1	180	So.
P	38	**Alex Kinal***	6-4	205	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	ELON
Sept. 12	at Syracuse
Sept. 19	at Army
Sept. 26	INDIANA
Oct. 3	FLORIDA STATE
Oct. 10	at Boston College
Oct. 17	at North Carolina
Oct. 24	NC STATE
Oct. 30	LOUISVILLE
Nov. 14	at Notre Dame
Nov. 21	at Clemson
Nov. 28	DUKE

2014 RESULTS

L	at ULM	10-17
W	GARDNER-WEBB	23-7
L	at Utah State	24-36
W	ARMY	24-21
L	at Louisville	10-20
L	at Florida State	3-43
L	SYRACUSE	7-30
L	BOSTON COLLEGE	17-23
L	CLEMSON	20-34
L	at NC State	13-42
W	VIRGINIA TECH (2OT)	6-3
L	at Duke	21-41

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	14.8	124
Rushing	39.9	124
Passing	176.3	107
Total	216.3	125
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	26.4	61
Rushing	182.7	T-81
Passing	186.6	12
Total	369.3	40
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 2	- 0.17	T-76

PICKING THE BIG TEN

Once Again, Big Ten Supremacy Resides in East

For the record, there still are two divisions in the Big Ten. Some pretty respected programs — Wisconsin, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota — will duke it out in the West in hopes of accomplishing something memorable.

But whom are we kidding? The Big Ten has become as lopsided as the SEC or Pac-12 ever was. Championship talk is all East, all the time.

Michigan State has won at least 11 games in four of the past five seasons, and its back-to-back bowl victories over Stanford in the Rose and Baylor in the Cotton cemented Sparty as a Top 10 automatic.

"We have a very strong foundation, and we need to build on that foundation as we move forward," said coach Mark Dantonio. "The reality is that expectations here are very, very high, and they should be. ... The first goal has to be to win this side of the (conference)."

Penn State is improving fast after a seamless handoff from Bill O'Brien to James Franklin, and of course there's Michigan. Perhaps you already heard about the Wolverines' hiring of — what's his name again? — Jim Harbaugh.

"There are no turnarounds at Michigan," Harbaugh said, as though the past seven seasons in Ann Arbor never happened. "This is greatness, and there's a long tradition of it."

But we've gone far enough without mentioning Ohio State, haven't we? OSU, fresh off a stirring performance in the first College Football Playoff, has taken an awfully-hard-to-get-to place alongside Alabama as one of the two premier programs in the sport. The Buckeyes are strong favorites to repeat as national champs in 2015.

"A complacent, entitled team is going to be really, really bad," said coach Urban Meyer. "A team that somehow has a chip on their shoulder, like (our 2014) team did, is going to be the essence of our season."

As a sports society, we tend to mythicize those who've won it all and come back for another crack at ultimate glory. Have we done that with, for example, Buckeyes quarterback Cardale Jones, who has three starts under his belt, yet enters the season as the college game's superstar du jour? It's possible, but there's no denying that a roster with Jones, J.T. Barrett, Ezekiel Elliott, Joey Bosa, Darron Lee et al. would be —

CONFERENCE PICKS

BIG TEN EAST	Good news	Bad news	Our call
1. Ohio State	The offense will be unstoppable. The defense will be ridiculous. It's the Buckeyes' world.	Early game at Virginia Tech will be rough stuff. A regular-season ender at Michigan could be, too.	The Buckeyes are bee-lining toward another playoff.
2. Michigan State	Connor Cook is back; his O-line is great; and who's about to doubt the coaching mastery of Mark Dantonio?	The Spartans lost some key defenders, and Pat Narduzzi isn't around to figure it out.	Talent-wise, Sparty looks up at only OSU in this league.
3. Michigan	Harbaugh! Seriously, has there been a more encouraging hire around these parts in forever?	The offense is a mess. Everyone would be down on Michigan if not for the coach.	It's only a matter of time before the Wolverines pull off that first mega-upset.
4. Penn State	Christian Hackenberg has a killer receiver corps to help boost his numbers.	Big Ten East has become so good that James Franklin is further behind the 8-ball than Bill O'Brien ever was.	It'll be another also-ran bowl game for the Nittany Lions.
5. Rutgers	Scarlet Knights coming off an eight-win season that issued a statement to the doubting masses.	Those huge home games against Ohio State and Michigan State? They're probably unwinnable.	It's a slow crawl for Kyle Flood's program.
6. Maryland	Randy Edsall has made it through to Year 5.	The Terps are hopelessly buried in this division.	Maybe we've underrated Indiana?
7. Indiana	Quarterback Nate Sudfeld is healthy again.	It isn't basketball season.	Kevin Wilson probably took the wrong job.
BIG TEN WEST			
1. Wisconsin	Madison native and UW alum Paul Chryst wants to be nowhere else.	That 59-0 loss to Ohio State in last season's Big Ten title game had to have left a mark.	Corey Clement will run wild, and the defense will be just good enough.
2. Nebraska	The Mike Riley-for-Bo Pelini exchange may make it possible for the Huskers to avoid losing four games.	The Huskers lost so much offense, they'll have to play defense like it's the mid-1990s.	The Big 12 days continue to look good.
3. Iowa	The running back position is deeper than it has been in years.	A rebuilt Hawkeyes defense can do only so much.	Iowa seems to do a little better when it isn't expected to do much.
4. Minnesota	The Gophers will be stout again on defense and disciplined throughout the lineup.	Getting torn up by TCU in the opener won't help anybody.	Touchdowns matter. Minny won't score many.
5. Illinois	Huge number of returning starters for the Illini.	The talent level is low in Champaign.	Tim Beckman will be up against it, even if he gets to six wins.
6. Northwestern	Justin Jackson runs the ball like a young Marcus Allen. Really.	If you didn't notice, the Wildcats have been awful two years in a row.	Pat Fitzgerald ought to get out while the getting is good.
7. Purdue	We'll let you know when we know of any.	It's as bad as it's ever been for the Boilermakers.	Utter oblivion. In case you were wondering.

should be — considered the best in any conference in the country.

"We're the Ohio State Buckeyes," said Meyer, "and we play pretty good ball. That's all I know."

For the Big Ten, the hard part will be avoiding the sort of long-term divisional imbalance that has existed in the SEC since Meyer's pair of national-title seasons at Florida. Will new coaches Paul Chryst at Wisconsin and Mike Riley at Nebraska be able to find that next level for their programs?

There has been nothing horrible wrong with either program. Wisconsin has averaged 10 wins across the past six seasons, but two coaches have decided to get up and leave. Nebraska is stuck in a four-loss rut.

Even if the new coaches at both places are the answer, the evidence will be difficult to see clearly this season. We can hope for a much better league title game than last year's Ohio State 59, Wisconsin 0 debacle, but frankly we may not get it.

— Steve Greenberg

HONOR ROLL

Most Accurate Passer	J.T. Barrett	Ohio State
Strongest Arm	Cardale Jones	Ohio State
Best Scrambler	Tommy Armstrong Jr.	Nebraska
Coolest in the Clutch	Connor Cook	Michigan State
Toughest to Bring Down	Ezekiel Elliott	Ohio State
Best Hands	Jordan Westerkamp	Nebraska
Most Dangerous Deep Threat	Leonte Carroo	Rutgers
Best Pass Blocker	Taylor Decker	Ohio State
Best Run Blocker	Pat Elflein	Ohio State
Best Pass Rusher	Joey Bosa	Ohio State
Best Cover Corner	Blake Countess	Michigan
Special Teams Demon	Nick VanHoose	Northwestern

Most Valuable Player

Cardale Jones
QB, Ohio State

Offensive Player of the Year

Ezekiel Elliott
RB, Ohio State

Defensive Player of the Year

Joey Bosa
DE, Ohio State

Newcomer of the Year

Jordan Howard
RB, Indiana

Lindy's ALL-BIG TEN TEAM

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Cardale Jones	Jr.	Ohio State
RB	Corey Clement	Jr.	Wisconsin
RB	Ezekiel Elliott	Jr.	Ohio State
WR	Leonte Carroo	Sr.	Rutgers
WR	Michael Thomas	Jr.	Ohio State
TE	Jake Butt	Jr.	Michigan
C	Jack Allen	Sr.	Michigan State
OL	Jack Conklin	Jr.	Michigan State
OL	Taylor Decker	Sr.	Ohio State
OL	Pat Elflein	Jr.	Ohio State
OL	Tyler Marz	Sr.	Wisconsin
AP	Janarion Grant	Jr.	Rutgers
K	Brad Craddock	Sr.	Maryland

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	Joey Bosa	Jr.	Ohio State
DL	Shilique Calhoun	Sr.	Michigan State
DL	Adolphus Washington	Sr.	Ohio State
DL	Anthony Zettel	Sr.	Penn State
LB	Ed Davis	Sr.	Michigan State
LB	Darron Lee	So.	Ohio State
LB	Joshua Perry	Sr.	Ohio State
DB	Vonn Bell	Jr.	Ohio State
DB	Blake Countess	Sr.	Michigan
DB	Nate Gerry	Jr.	Nebraska
DB	Jabrill Peppers	So.	Michigan
P	Peter Mortell	Sr.	Minnesota

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Connor Cook	Sr.	Michigan State
RB	Justin Jackson	So.	Northwestern
RB	Akeel Lynch	Sr.	Penn State
WR	DaeSean Hamilton	So.	Penn State
WR	Jordan Westerkamp	Jr.	Nebraska
TE	Josiah Price	Jr.	Michigan State
C	Dan Voltz	Jr.	Wisconsin
OL	Josh Campion	Sr.	Minnesota
OL	Dan Feeney	Jr.	Indiana
OL	Billy Price	So.	Ohio State
OL	Jason Spriggs	Sr.	Indiana
AP	De'Mornay Pierson-El	So.	Nebraska
K	Rafael Gaglianone	So.	Wisconsin

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Maliek Collins	Jr.	Nebraska
DL	Drew Ott	Sr.	Iowa
DL	Lawrence Thomas	Sr.	Michigan State
DL	Vincent Valentine	Jr.	Nebraska
LB	Raekwon McMillan	So.	Ohio State
LB	Joe Schobert	Sr.	Wisconsin
LB	Nyeem Wartman	Jr.	Penn State
DB	Eli Apple	So.	Ohio State
DB	Briean Boddy-Calhoun	Sr.	Minnesota
DB	William Likely	Jr.	Maryland
DB	Michael Caputo	Sr.	Wisconsin
P	Cameron Johnston	Jr.	Ohio State

OFFENSE - THIRD TEAM

QB	Christian Hackenberg	Jr.	Penn State
RB	Josh Ferguson	Sr.	Illinois
RB	Jordan Howard	Jr.	Indiana
WR	Geronimo Allison	Sr.	Illinois
WR	Geno Lewis	Jr.	Penn State
TE	Troy Fumagalli	So.	Wisconsin
C	Austin Blythe	Sr.	Iowa
OL	Mason Cole	So.	Michigan
OL	Alex Lewis	Sr.	Nebraska
OL	Jordan Walsh	Sr.	Iowa
OL	Andrew Zeller	Sr.	Maryland
AP	Jalin Marshall	So.	Ohio State
K	Paul Griggs	Sr.	Purdue

DEFENSE - THIRD TEAM

DL	Theiren Cockran	Sr.	Minnesota
DL	Dean Lowry	Sr.	Northwestern
DL	Steven Richardson	So.	Minnesota
DL	Jihad Ward	Sr.	Illinois
LB	Vince Biegel	Jr.	Wisconsin
LB	Steve Longa	Jr.	Rutgers
LB	Matthew Harris	Jr.	Northwestern
DB	Desmond King	Jr.	Iowa
DB	Darius Hillary	Sr.	Wisconsin
DB	Jourdan Lewis	Jr.	Michigan
DB	Eric Murray	Sr.	Minnesota
P	Sam Foltz	Jr.	Nebraska

THE BIG ONES

Sept. 3	
Michigan at Utah	Let's see how Jim Harbaugh's toughness translates in return to Pac-12 country.
TCU at Minnesota	Gophers were dominated in Fort Worth in '14. Shake up the world in '15?
Sept. 5	
Wisconsin vs. Alabama (Arlington)	Victory seems so far-fetched here for UW. Survival may work well enough.
Sept. 7	
Ohio State at Virginia Tech	Buckeyes' enormous momentum is meaningless if they don't get revenge here.
Sept. 12	
Oregon at Michigan State	Speaking of revenge … Sparty still thinks it should've won in Eugene last year.
Sept. 19	
Nebraska at Miami	Huskers DBs will be tested by QB Brad Kaaya. Test for Mike Riley, too.
Rutgers at Penn State	First Big Ten game of year affords each team chance to make a statement.
Sept. 26	
BYU at Michigan	Another toughness check for Harbaugh's squad. Cougs run the ball hard.
Oct. 3	
Iowa at Wisconsina	Badgers' first chance under Paul Chryst to assert themselves as West favorites.
Oct. 10	
Wisconsin at Nebraska	Huskers have allowed an unspeakable 129 points in past two meetings.
Oct. 17	
Michigan State at Michigan	Paul Bunyan Trophy game has gone Spartans' way in six of past seven.
Penn State at Ohio State	Christian Hackenberg vs. Cardale Jones? We'll take it every week, please.
Nebraska at Minnesota	This is where we find out how serious Gophers are about contending in West.
Oct. 24	
Penn State vs. Maryland (Baltimore)	Recruiting — 197 miles from College Park to State College — is at stake.
Oct. 31	
Michigan at Minnesota	Wolverines were blown out at home by Gophs last season in Ann Arbor.
Nov. 7	
Michigan State at Nebraska	Huskers nearly pulled off huge comeback in '14. Win here would be huge.
Minnesota at Ohio State	Buckeyes were challenged to the max in Minneapolis a season ago.
Nov. 14	
Minnesota at Iowa	Who are the Hawkeyes, anyway? Iowa looking to surprise in the West.
Nov. 21	
Michigan State at Ohio State	De facto East title game? One of most important games of year in CFB.
Michigan at Penn State	James Franklin tries to maintain position over Harbaugh & Co. in East.
Nov. 28	
Ohio State at Michigan	Just remember: Harbaugh's early Stanford teams were hell on Pac-12 big boys.
Penn State at Michigan State	Hackenberg vs. Connor Cook? We'll take that matchup every week, too.
Wisconsin at Minnesota	How many straight for Badgers in this rivalry? Believe it — 11.
Northwestern vs. Illinois (Chicago)	Bowl was on line for both when Illini won last year. Could be same again.
Indiana at Purdue	Old Oaken Bucket? May as well call this Somebody Has to Win Bowl.

EZEKIEL ELLIOTT

Photo by Matthew Emmons-USA TODAY Sports

BOWL CONNECTIONS

Big Ten champ — College football playoff or Rose Bowl vs. Pac-12

Other affiliations:
Outback vs. SEC
Citrus vs. SEC
Holiday vs. Pac-12
Tax Slayer vs. SEC
Music City vs. SEC
Foster Farms vs. Pac-12
Pinstripe vs. ACC
Quick Lane vs. ACC
Heart of Dallas vs. C-USA

Citrus and Music City bowls have option for Big Ten or ACC team.

TOP 10 NFL TALENT

1. Joey Bosa	DE	Jr.	Ohio State	Pure explosion off the ball, and he's only getting better.
2. Christian Hackenberg	QB	Jr.	Penn State	Coming off a shaky season, but has all the first-round tools.
3. Cardale Jones	QB	Jr.	Ohio State	Arm strength and instincts are wondrous. And zero fear.
4. Connor Cook	QB	Sr.	Michigan State	Tall, strong, confident and the No. 1 senior QB prospect.
5. Taylor Decker	OT	Sr.	Ohio State	A 6-7 bookend with versatility to play either tackle spot.
6. Ezekiel Elliott	RB	Jr.	Ohio State	Home-run speed meets move-the-chains mentality.
7. Jack Conklin	OT	Jr.	Michigan State	Pure left tackle who could vault over Decker on this list.
8. Shilique Calhoun	DE	Sr.	Michigan State	Massive potential as pro pass rusher; has to turn it up in '15.
9. Anthony Zettel	DT	Sr.	Penn State	Lacks girth, but brings a huge man's attitude and toughness.
10. Darron Lee	LB	So.	Ohio State	Has athleticism to skyrocket into first round in '16.

*Only draft-eligible players included.

By Steve Wiltfong 247Sports

BIG 10 RECRUITING

OHIO STATE: The defending national champions finished with the nation's No. 7-ranked recruiting class according to 247Sports. Six prospects ranked inside the Top100, led by in-state linebackers Justin Hilliard and Jerome Baker. The Buckeyes loaded up in the trenches by taking six offensive linemen, led by Isaiah Prince and Matthew Burrell, and six defensive linemen, led by Jashon Cornell and Dre'Mont Jones. Two four-star quarterbacks signed — Torrance Gibson and Ohio's Mr. Football Joe Burrow.

PENN STATE: James Franklin and his staff brought in the No. 14 class in the country, with 16 of the 25 recruits ranking four-stars by either 247Sports or the 247Sports Composite. The most pivotal addition was one of the nation's top JUCO offensive tackles, Paris Palmer. The Nittany Lions added depth on defense signing cornerbacks Garrett Taylor and John Reid, defensive end Ryan Buchholz and linebackers Jake Cooper and Manny Bowen. Penn State signed seven of the top nine players in-state.

MICHIGAN STATE: The nation's No. 22-ranked recruiting class for the Spartans is led by Top100 running back Larry Scott. What Michigan State did on defense was also very impressive, bringing in four-star defensive tackle Raequan Williams along with linebackers Tyriq Thompson, Drake Martinez and Grayson Miller, defensive ends Cassius Peat, Mufi Hunt and Justice Alexander, and defensive backs David Dowell, Josh Butler, Tyson Smith and Khari Willis.

NEBRASKA: Mike Riley and his new staff finished strong with a 20-player class that ranked 31st nationally. The big get was four-star offensive lineman Jalin Barnett. The strength of the class is the secondary, with four-stars Eric Lee and Avery Anderson. Defensive end Daishon Neal has the ability to be a big-timer. Receivers Lavan Alston and Stanley Morgan, tight end Matt Snyder and running back Devine Ozigbo were strong additions.

WISCONSIN: The program's strength stays the same, offensive line and running back. Incoming RB Jordan Stevenson ran for over 2,000 yards his final two prep seasons. Offensive tackle Kevin Estes could be the next great one in Madison. Arrington Farrar was a four-star safety who will play linebacker, and Kyle Penniston is one of the country's top tight ends. The No. 1 player in Wisconsin, offensive tackle Jon Dietzen, signed with Wisconsin.

MICHIGAN: The Wolverines signed a small class, 14 total, but all could be difference makers. The jewel is the No. 1 prospect from the state, Brian Cole, who will play receiver. Jim Harbaugh brings in capable quarterbacks in Alex Malzone and Zach Gentry. Michigan added five other four-stars — safety Tyree Kinnel, offensive tackle Grant Newsome, tight end Tyrone Wheatley Jr., defensive end Shelton Johnson and running back Karan Higdon.

ILLINOIS: Illinois coach Tim Beckman and his staff are pleased with what they have coming on the offensive side of the ball. Both running backs, Dre Brown and four-star Ke'Shawn Vaughn, should play as true freshmen. Top247 offensive tackle Gabe Megginson is the headliner of six offensive linemen. The class has several JUCO prospects, including tight end Andrew Davis.

MARYLAND: The Terrapins are putting great emphasis on getting top talent to stay home. Two of the area's best signed — defensive tackle Adam McLean and four-star offensive guard Quarvez Boulware. Out of Philadelphia, D.J. Moore should be instant impact at receiver. This 18-player class that ranked No. 48 nationally finished with five offensive linemen and four defensive linemen.

INDIANA: The Hoosiers needed a talented quarterback and got him in former N.C. State commit Austin King. Kevin Wilson and his staff also wanted more dynamic receivers with Camion Patrick, Leon Thornton, Isaac James, Nicholas Westbrook and Donavan Hale all bringing different sizes and skill sets. Safety was a priority and four-star Tyler Green, a former Ohio State commit, is the jewel of the class.

NORTHWESTERN: Pat Fitzgerald and his staff beat Alabama, Michigan State and Notre Dame for defensive tackle Jordan Thompson out of Cincinnati. Complimenting Thompson are defensive ends Joe Gaziano and Trent Goens. Running back John Moten has legit speed and Flynn Nagel is a prolific receiver. The Wildcats signed 20 prospects, including linebackers Nathan Fox, Simba Short and Tommy Vitale.

RUTGERS: The strength of the Rutgers class is on the defensive side of the ball, led by four-star defensive end Marques Ford and safety Najee Clayton, both of whom had high-end SEC opportunities. Nakia Griffin has a chance to be a big-time tight end.

IOWA: The Hawkeyes' program is sometimes called offensive line heaven. The tradition continues with this group, led by center James Daniels. The state's Gatorade Player of the Year, quarterback Ryan Boyle, will love playing behind those guys. He'll be pushed by another in-state quarterback, Drew Cook. The state's No. 1 recruit, defensive end Brady Reiff, signed with the Hawkeyes.

MINNESOTA: Quarterback commit Demry Croft has the size, athleticism and upside to become one of the best players in the Big Ten at his position. The Gophers are bringing in several under-the-radar prospects, including receiver Hunter Register and running back Shannon Brooks. Offensive linemen Tyler Moore, Quinn Oseland, Bronson Dovich and Nick Connelly make a good group. Minnesota signed 24 in the 2015 recruiting cycle.

PURDUE: For a class that finished at the bottom of the Big Ten, there are some gems and immediate difference makers for the Boilermakers. Had quarterback Elijah Sindelar not enrolled early, big-time programs would've made a late run. Linebackers Wyatt Cook and Markus Bailey were really big gets. Defensive end Chazmyn Turner was a good find in North Carolina. Offensive tackles Matt McCann and Larry Wells were two of the Midwest's best.

NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR: Michigan signee Brian Cole is expected to play a big role in the Wolverines offense as a true freshman that enrolled early. Ranked by 247Sports as the nation's No. 5 athlete recruit, the 6-2, 190-pound Cole has game-changing ability in the slot with his size and speed. He's a player Michigan can utilize on jet sweeps and bubble screens.

TOP SLEEPERS: RYAN BOYLE, SHANNON BROOKS AND ALEC INGOLD: Boyle is a big-time winner coming from the prep level and Iowa didn't have much competition securing his verbal in 2015. Brooks is a big-time athlete that should be very productive as a Gopher. Ingold played quarterback on the prep level but has all the ability to blossom into a standout linebacker for the Badgers.

LIKELY TO BE THE BEST NFL PLAYER: Michigan State's Larry Scott is a complete back with his ability to run tough in between the tackles and catch the ball out of the backfield. Out of Hubbard (Ohio) High, Scott will continue to the strong tradition the Spartans have out of the backfield, and the Top100 recruit could find his name all over the record book in East Lansing when it's all said and done.

NO. 1 SIGNING COUPS: OHIO STATE AND PENN STATE

The Buckeyes are bringing in one of the nation's top offensive line and linebacker classes, with Isaiah Prince and Matthew Burrell leading a six-player O-line group and in-state standouts Justin Hilliard, Jerome Baker and Nick Conner being a three-headed monster at linebacker. The Nittany Lions are bringing in a versatile secondary class with four-star cornerbacks Garrett Taylor and John Reid as headliners, and Ayron Monroe being a terrific safety recruit.

BIGGEST MISSES: The Spartans signed a strong class, with several difference makers across the board. But coming off a Rose Bowl, MSU looked prime to sign three more of the state's best in Michael Weber (Ohio State), Brian Cole (Michigan) and John Kelly (Tennessee). Regardless, we know Mark Dantonio and his staff will quickly move on and develop the next guy.

BEST RECRUITING STAFF: Ohio State had five recruiters finish in the top eight of the 247Sports conference recruiter rankings, led by Stan Drayton, who is now with the Chicago Bears, Kerry Coombs and Larry Johnson finishing 1, 2 and 3. Ed Warinner finished sixth and Chris Ash ended eighth. Ohio State landed players from 11 different states, including South Dakota and Utah.

TOP 20 INCOMING RECRUITS

RK	NAME	HT/WT	POS	HOMETOWN/SCHOOL	COLLEGE
1.	Justin Hilliard	6-0/225	LB	Cincinnati, Ohio/St. Xavier	Ohio State
2.	Larry Scott	6-2/228	RB	Hubbard, Ohio/Hubbard	Michigan State
3.	Jerome Baker	6-2/203	ATH	Cleveland, Ohio/Benedictine	Ohio State
4.	Brian Cole	6-2/190	ATH	Saginaw, Mich./Heritage	Michigan
5.	Torrance Gibson	6-4/204	ATH	Fort Lauderdale, Fla./American Heritage	Ohio State
6.	Michael Weber	5-9.5/219	RB	Detroit, Mich./Cass Tech	Ohio State
7.	Jashon Cornell	6-4/260	DE	Saint Paul, Minn./Cretin Derham Hall	Ohio State
8.	Eric Glover-Williams	5-11/165	CB	Canton, Ohio/McKinley	Ohio State
9.	Isaiah Prince	6-6/272	OT	Greenbelt, Ohio/Eleanor Roosevelt	Ohio State
10.	Matthew Burrell	6-4/321	OG	Woodbridge, Va./C.D. Hylton	Ohio State
11.	Saquon Barkley	5-11/190	RB	Whitehall, Pa./Whitehall	Penn State
12.	Adam McLean	6-2/290	DT	Gaithersburg, Md./Quince Orchard	Maryland
13.	Garrett Taylor	6-1/195	CB	Richmond, Va./St. Christopher's	Penn State
14.	John Reid	5-10/180	CB	Philadelphia, Pa./St. Joseph's	Penn State
15.	Eric Lee	6-0/175	CB	Littleton, Colo./Valor Christian	Nebraska
16.	Juwan Johnson	6-4/216	WR	Glassboro, N.J./Glassboro	Penn State
17.	Dre'Mont Jones	6-3/266	DE	Cleveland, Ohio/St. Ignatius	Ohio State
18.	K.J. Hill	6-0/188	WR	North Little Rock, Ark./North Little Rock	Ohio State
19.	Ryan Bates	6-5/275	OT	Warminster, Pa./Archbishop Wood	Penn State
20.	Zach Gentry	6-7/230	QB	Albuquerque, N.M./Eldorado	Michigan

OHIO STATE | BUCKEYES

Big Ten rank: 1 Record: 14-1 Big Ten record: 8-0 (1st, East) Stadium: Ohio Stadium (104,944)

RANKING 1

BUCKEYES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Columbus, Ohio
COACH: Urban Meyer — At Ohio State: 38-3, 3 years; overall: 142-26, 14 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Ed Warinner
DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Luke Fickell, Chris Ash

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 17; 8 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Cardale Jones, QB J.T. Barrett, QB Braxton Miller, WR Michael Thomas, RB Ezekiel Elliott, LT Taylor Decker, DE Joey Bosa, DT Adolphus Washington, LB Raekwon McMillan, S Vonn Bell

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Ohio State is most known for its quarterback battle, but the Buckeyes also have a Heisman candidate in Elliott, a veteran offensive line and versatile skill position players who should keep the offense humming the way it was during last year's College Football Playoff run.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The defense played at a very high level at the end of last season, and though the Buckeyes return seven starters, there are some key players missing from this year's unit. Can Gareon Conley replace lockdown cornerback Doran Grant? Keeping the defense at a dominant level is Ohio State's top concern.

OFFENSE

Ohio State enters fall camp firmly in the national spotlight, its quarterback situation uncertain and yet spectacular. Truth is, the defending national champion Buckeyes will be fine in any scenario.

Junior Cardale Jones got the Buckeyes across the finish line to the national championship last season after an injury to sophomore J.T. Barrett, who didn't miss a beat while filling in for the injured Braxton Miller, now a senior.

Regardless of who starts at QB, Ohio State's offense is simply stacked. Junior running back Ezekiel Elliott rushed for 696 yards in three postseason games to lift the team to the inaugural College Football Playoff title. Behind Elliott is sophomore Curtis Samuel, a player who took reps at H-Back in the spring and could be a versatile weapon.

The Buckeyes lost wide receivers Devin Smith and Evan Spencer, but Michael Thomas enters his junior season as one of the best pass-catchers in the country and a potential first-round NFL draft pick. H-back Jalin Marshall emerged as a downfield threat in the postseason run, and the Buckeyes could shift him outside and put Samuel at H-back.

As for the offensive line, the Buckeyes return four starters from a unit that turned out to be simply dominant down the stretch of last season.

DEFENSE

Ohio State's defense isn't quite as loaded as its offense, but the Buckeyes should be plenty good enough and deep enough to handle any team on its schedule and into the College Football Playoff.

The Buckeyes lost a key player on the interior defensive line in Michael Bennett, but they return defensive end Joey Bosa — an unstoppable force on the edge who could end up being the top overall pick in next year's NFL Draft. Adolphus Washington will be a force inside, and sophomore Tyquan Lewis, a former four-star prospect, will start opposite Bosa.

JOEY BOSA
Photo by Joe Robbins

"It was like everything was going in slow motion and I was going a different speed. That's how I felt."
— RB Ezekiel Elliott, on his postseason success

Ohio State will replace middle linebacker Curtis Grant with sophomore Raekwon McMillan, a former five-star prospect. McMillan had an instant impact on Ohio State's defense last year despite not starting. He should fit seamlessly — and with more explosive athleticism — into the position next to Darron Lee and Joshua Perry.

In the secondary, veteran Doran Grant is gone, but the Buckeyes will replace him with redshirt sophomore Gareon Conley at cornerback opposite Eli Apple. The back end of Ohio State's defense will be manned by returning safeties Vonn Bell and Tyvis Powell.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Ohio State has one of the best punters in the game in Cameron Johnston, who averaged 45.1 yards per attempt last season. Sophomore kicker Sean Nuernberger returns after making 13 of 20 field goal attempts a year ago, with a long of 49 yards.

OVERVIEW

Some would say Ohio State's national championship was a year early. Now the Buckeyes are fully stocked and looking every bit capable of becoming a sustainable college football dynasty as they begin their defense of Urban Meyer's first national title in Columbus and third overall.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Mike Weber: A former four-star prospect from Detroit Cass Tech — a high school that's become important to Urban Meyer's recruiting efforts — Weber's arrival at Ohio State was tumultuous after running backs coach Stan Drayton left for the Chicago Bears the day after Signing Day. Things, however, smoothed over with Weber, and he could have an instant role on the already-deep Buckeyes offense.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	12	**Cardale Jones***	6-5	250	Jr.
RB	15	**Ezekiel Elliott***	6-0	225	Jr.
WR	3	**Michael Thomas***	6-3	210	Jr.
WR	80	Noah Brown	6-2	222	So.
HB	17	**Jalin Marshall***	5-11	205	So.
TE	81	Nick Vannett	6-6	260	Sr.
LT	68	**Taylor Decker***	6-8	315	Sr.
LG	54	**Billy Price***	6-4	315	So.
C	50	**Jacoby Boren***	6-2	285	Sr.
RG	65	**Pat Elflein***	6-3	300	Jr.
RT	57	Chase Farris	6-5	310	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	97	**Joey Bosa***	6-6	275	Jr.
NT	90	Tommy Schutt	6-3	290	Sr.
DT	92	**Adolphus Washington***	6-4	290	Sr.
DE	59	Tyquan Lewis	6-4	260	So.
LB	37	**Joshua Perry***	6-4	254	Sr.
LB	5	Raekwon McMillan	6-2	240	So.
LB	43	**Darron Lee***	6-2	235	So.
CB	13	**Eli Apple***	6-1	200	So.
CB	19	Gareon Conley	6-0	195	So.
S	23	**Tyvis Powell***	6-3	210	Jr.
S	11	**Vonn Bell***	5-11	205	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	96	**Sean Nuernberger***	6-1	220	So.
P	95	**Cam Johnston***	5-11	195	Jr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Virginia Tech
Sept. 12	HAWAII
Sept. 19	NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 26	WESTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 3	at Indiana
Oct. 10	MARYLAND
Oct. 17	PENN STATE
Oct. 24	at Rutgers
Nov. 7	MINNESOTA
Nov. 14	at Illinois
Nov. 21	MICHIGAN STATE
Nov. 28	at Michigan

2014 RESULTS

W	vs. Navy (Baltimore, MD)	34-17
L	VIRGINIA TECH	21-35
W	KENT STATE	66-0
W	CINCINNATI	50-28
W	at Maryland	52-24
W	RUTGERS	56-17
W	at Penn State (2OT)	31-24
W	ILLINOIS	55-14
W	at Michigan State	49-37
W	at Minnesota	31-24
W	INDIANA	42-27
W	MICHIGAN	42-28
	Big Ten Championship Game	
W	vs. Wisconsin	59-0
	Sugar Bowl - Semifinal	
W	vs. Alabama	42-35
	National Championship Game	
W	vs. Oregon	42-20

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	44.8	5
Rushing	264.5	8
Passing	247.1	51
Total	511.6	9
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	22.0	26
Rushing	141.3	34
Passing	201.1	28
Total	342.4	19
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 7	+ 0.47	32

MICHIGAN STATE | SPARTANS

Big Ten rank: 2 Record: 11-2 Big Ten record: 7-1 (2nd, East) Stadium: Spartan Stadium (75,005)

RANKING 6

SPARTANS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: East Lansing, Mich.
COACH: Mark Dantonio — At Michigan State: 75-31, 8 years; overall: 93-48, 11 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Dave Warner, Jim Bollman
DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Harlon Barnett, Mike Tressel

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2013
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2006
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 6 offense, 7 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Connor Cook, WR Aaron Burbridge, C Jack Allen, OT Jack Conklin, TE Josiah Price, DE Shilique Calhoun, DE Lawrence Thomas, LB Ed Davis, S Montae Nicholson

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Spartans should be strong in the trenches, returning heralded talent up front on both sides. Perhaps most notably, Cook is under center for a third season after leading MSU to two straight top-5 finishes and wins in the Rose and Cotton bowls. Price, Burbridge and Macgarett Kings Jr. headline a deep group of capable targets for Cook.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: MSU's vaunted defense is effective in large part by relying on its cornerbacks to be left alone in press coverage. That's easier when those corners include first-round NFL draft picks Darqueze Dennard (Bengals) and/or Trae Waynes (Vikings). The job falls this season to a bevy of less-renowned players, though some with a fair amount of experience.

SHILIQUE CALHOUN
Photo by Joe Robbins

OFFENSE

A unit that two years ago faced doubts at almost every position has flipped the script. There are zero real concerns on offense for the Spartans this season.

Quarterback Connor Cook returns for his third season as the starter — Rose Bowl and Cotton Bowl trophies in hand — along with the most prominent members of the offensive line and several proven pass-catching targets.

The senior chose to put off the NFL for a year after throwing for 6,063 yards, 47 touchdowns and 15 interceptions during the past two seasons.

The Spartans have to replace leading receiver Tony Lippett, but they're hoping one of two already-proven seniors, Aaron Burbridge or Macgarrett Kings Jr., can become the go-to guy. Tight end is a strong position, featuring Josiah Price and up-and-comer Jamal Lyles.

There is more wondering than worrying at running back, where Jeremy Langford and his more than 2,900 yards in the last two seasons has moved on to the NFL with the Chicago Bears. A good candidate should emerge from four tailbacks expected to compete: sophomore Gerald Holmes, redshirt freshman Madre London, true freshman LJ Scott and junior Delton Williams, who was suspended in the spring.

The bruising Williams has modest experience. The others have a combined 15 career carries, all from Holmes. All four arrived with a fair amount of hype, none more so than Scott, who spurned home-state Ohio State for the Spartans.

DEFENSE

MSU's front seven has a chance to be ferocious, with All-American defensive end Shilique Calhoun alongside athletic behemoths Lawrence Thomas and Malik McDowell on the line.

They work in front of linebackers Riley Bullough and Ed Davis. Bullough is the younger brother of former captain Max Bullough and appears to be a better fit in the middle than one-year stop-gap Taiwan Jones.

> "We try to be built for the long haul here. ... We're here to stay. And that's got to be a mind-set."
>
> — Mark Dantonio

The questions are in the back end, where MSU is replacing a first-round NFL draft pick at cornerback (Trae Waynes) for the second time in two seasons. At the end of spring practice, juniors Demetrius Cox, Jermain Edmondson and senior Arjen Colquhoun were the frontrunners at a position the Spartans depend on heavily for everything they want to do defensively.

At safety, rapidly emerging sophomore Montae Nicholson and vocal senior RJ Williamson are expected to start.

SPECIALISTS

Junior kicker Michael Geiger, who is coming off hip surgery, struggled as a sophomore, making 14 of 22 field goal attempts. He hit 15 of 16 as a freshman. At punter, MSU turns to redshirt freshman Jake Hartbarger to replace four-year standout Mike Sadler. Hartbarger was rated among the top punters in the country coming out high school in Ohio.

OVERVIEW

Michigan State's season could again come down to a late-season matchup with Ohio State, this time in Columbus on Nov. 21. The Spartans host Oregon early, as well. This is an MSU program with a step left to take — the College Football Playoff. With Cook and Calhoun headlining a large senior class, this might be the Spartans' best chance.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB LJ Scott: There isn't much need or room for impact newcomers on MSU's roster these days, but Scott could be a player to watch in an open competition. Scott is a heralded Ohio prospect who chose the Spartans over Ohio State, among others.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	18	**Connor Cook***	6-4	220	Sr.
RB	24	Gerald Holmes	6-0	218	So.
WR	16	Aaron Burbridge	6-1	208	Sr.
WR	85	Macgarett Kings Jr.	5-10	186	Sr.
WR	12	R.J. Shelton	5-10	200	Jr.
TE	82	**Josiah Price***	6-4	250	Jr.
LT	74	**Jack Conklin***	6-6	317	Jr.
LG	65	Brian Allen	6-2	306	So.
C	66	**Jack Allen***	6-2	295	Sr.
RG	76	**Donavon Clark***	6-4	317	Sr.
RT	79	**Kodi Kieler***	6-6	310	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	89	**Shilique Calhoun***	6-5	250	Sr.
DT	92	**Joel Heath***	6-6	296	Sr.
NT	4	Malik McDowell	6-6	285	So.
DE	8	**Lawrence Thomas***	6-4	300	Sr.
STAR	45	**Darien Harris***	6-0	220	Sr.
LB	30	Riley Bullough	6-2	230	Jr.
SAM	43	**Ed Davis***	6-3	233	Sr.
CB	7	Demetrious Cox	6-1	200	Jr.
CB	36	Arjen Colquhoun	6-1	197	Sr.
SS	9	**Montae Nicholson***	6-2	216	So.
FS	26	**RJ Williamson***	6-0	215	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	4	**Michael Geiger***	5-8	188	Jr.
P	25	Jake Hartbarger	6-4	205	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	at Western Michigan
Sept. 12	OREGON
Sept. 19	AIR FORCE
Sept. 26	CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Oct. 3	PURDUE
Oct. 10	at Rutgers
Oct. 17	at Michigan
Oct. 24	INDIANA
Nov. 7	at Nebraska
Nov. 14	MARYLAND
Nov. 21	at Ohio State
Nov. 28	PENN STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	JACKSONVILLE STATE	45-7
L	at Oregon	27-46
W	EASTERN MICHIGAN	73-14
W	WYOMING	56-14
W	NEBRASKA	27-22
W	at Purdue	45-31
W	at Indiana	56-17
W	MICHIGAN	35-11
L	OHIO STATE	37-49
W	at Maryland	37-15
W	RUTGERS	45-3
W	at Penn State	34-10
	Cotton Bowl Classic	
W	vs. Baylor	42-41

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	43.0	7
Rushing	235.2	19
Passing	265.6	35
Total	500.8	11
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	21.5	22
Rushing	88.5	1
Passing	227.3	60
Total	315.8	8
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 19	+ 1.46	2

WISCONSIN | BADGERS

Big Ten rank: 3 Record: 11-3 Big Ten record: 7-1 (1st, West) Stadium: Camp Randall (80,321)

RANKING 16

BADGERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Madison, Wis.
COACH: Paul Chryst — At Wisconsin: 1st year; overall: 19-20, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Joe Rudolph
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Dave Aranda

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2012
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2001
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 4 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Joel Stave, RB Corey Clement, WR Alex Erickson, TE Troy Fumagalli, LB Vince Biegel, LB Joe Schobert, S Michael Caputo, S Tanner McEvoy

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Wisconsin's secondary will be downright scary. McEvoy's transition from quarterback to safety will give the Badgers another big body on the back end. On offense, Stave and his 28 starts return, and Clement is talented enough for an all-conference kind of year.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The running backs might not find the same holes available because of an inexperienced offensive line that must replace three starters. Right tackle Hayden Biegel and right guard Michael Deiter have potential, but are unproven. On defense, Wisconsin replaces two productive inside linebackers who combined for 177 tackles.

COREY CLEMENT
Photo by Joe Robbins

OFFENSE

Heisman Trophy finalist Melvin Gordon is gone. That means Wisconsin will have to figure out how to come close to replicating his production. The Badgers are good at solving this kind of problem.

Corey Clement is ready for his star turn, taking over as the team's top tailback after rushing for 949 yards and nine touchdowns last season. He will get help from others who are, for now, unproven, including Dare Ogunbowale, Taiwan Deal and, potentially, incoming freshman Jordan Stevenson.

Wisconsin does return quarterback Joel Stave, who did not have his best season a year ago when he threw more interceptions (10) than touchdown passes (nine). But he is 21-7 over three years as a starter.

Stave's receiving targets are still to be determined, but the primary threat will once again be Alex Erickson, who led the team last season in receptions (55) and yards (772). Senior Jordan Fredrick and junior Rob Wheelwright are in position to see significant snaps.

Wisconsin must replace three starters on the line. The likely candidates to do so are left guard Ray Ball, right guard Michael Deiter and right tackle Hayden Biegel. Of the three, only Ball has played in a college game, although he has yet to make a start.

DEFENSE

The undeniable strength of Wisconsin's defense in 2015 will be its secondary, which is loaded with playmakers. Start with cornerbacks Darius Hillary and Sojourn Shelton, who have combined to start 51 college games.

Hillary developed into the team's shutdown corner a year ago and finished with 41 tackles. Shelton, meanwhile, experienced a sophomore slump after an outstanding freshman campaign in which he led the team with four interceptions. He made strides in the offseason to improve his mental toughness and be a leader in the secondary.

At safety, Wisconsin returns leading tackler and all-around tough guy Michael Caputo. He'll be joined by Tanner McEvoy, who opened last season as the starting quarterback. McEvoy did not fit into new coach Paul Chryst's plans for a pro-style quarterback, so he'll find time on the field where he can best be utilized.

> "He's been the biggest breakout guy so far on defense ... There's a confidence and a swagger coming back to him."
> — DC Dave Aranda, on CB Sojourn Shelton

The Badgers possess talented outside linebackers Vince Biegel and Joe Schobert. The duo combined for 30 tackles for loss, including 10.5 sacks, a year ago.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Rafael Gaglianone buried 19 of 22 field goal tries, including two 50-yarders, as a true freshman. Senior punter Drew Meyer has seen his average decrease every year since his freshman season, down to 37.4 last season. George Rushing is a top candidate for kick returns, while Alex Erickson is a viable punt return option.

OVERVIEW

Wisconsin has the pieces in place to compete, again, for the Big Ten West division title. Road games against Nebraska and Minnesota likely will decide the Badgers' fate. This is a team that has come to expect New Year's Day bowl games and has played in five consecutive such contests. A sixth is a realistic goal.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB T.J. Edwards: He was one of only two redshirt freshmen — offensive lineman Michael Deiter being the other — to practice with the starting offense or defense in spring practice. Edwards, from an inside linebacker spot, tallied nine tackles and a sack in the spring game.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	2	**Joel Stave***	6-5	220	Sr.
RB	6	Corey Clement	5-11	217	Jr.
WR	86	**Alex Erickson***	6-0	196	Sr.
WR	15	Rob Wheelwright	6-2	201	Jr.
WR	9	Jordan Fredrick	6-4	214	Sr.
TE	48	Troy Fumagalli	6-5	246	So.
LT	61	**Tyler Marz***	6-5	321	Sr.
LG	71	Ray Ball	6-7	324	Sr.
C	70	**Dan Voltz***	6-3	311	Jr.
RG	63	Michael Deiter	6-5	317	Fr.
RT	74	Hayden Biegel	6-6	303	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	93	Jake Keefer	6-3	269	Sr.
NG	95	Arthur Goldberg	6-3	290	Jr.
DE	34	**Chikwe Obasih***	6-2	268	So.
LB	47	**Vince Biegel***	6-4	244	Jr.
LB	53	T.J. Edwards	6-1	229	Fr.
LB	32	Leon Jacobs	6-2	230	Jr.
LB	58	**Joe Schobert***	6-2	240	Sr.
CB	8	**Sojourn Shelton***	5-9	178	Jr.
CB	5	**Darius Hillary***	5-11	188	Sr.
SS	7	**Michael Caputo***	6-1	212	Sr.
FS	11	Tanner McEvoy	6-6	222	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	10	**Rafael Gaglianone***	5-11	231	So.
P	90	**Drew Meyer***	6-3	187	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	vs. Alabama (Dallas, TX)
Sept. 12	MIAMI (OH)
Sept. 19	TROY
Sept. 26	HAWAII
Oct. 3	IOWA
Oct. 10	at Nebraska
Oct. 17	PURDUE
Oct. 24	at Illinois
Oct. 31	RUTGERS
Nov. 7	at Maryland
Nov. 21	NORTHWESTERN
Nov. 28	at Minnesota

2014 RESULTS

L	vs. LSU (Houston, TX)	24-28
W	WESTERN ILLINOIS	37-3
W	BOWLING GREEN	68-17
W	SOUTH FLORIDA	27-10
L	at Northwestern	14-20
W	ILLINOIS	38-28
W	MARYLAND	52-7
W	at Rutgers	37-0
W	at Purdue	34-16
W	NEBRASKA	59-24
W	at Iowa	26-24
W	MINNESOTA	34-24
	Big Ten Championship Game	
L	vs. Ohio State	0-59
	Outback Bowl	
W	vs. Auburn (OT)	34-31

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	34.6	27
Rushing	320.1	3
Passing	148.7	116
Total	468.9	21
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	20.8	17
Rushing	126.1	23
Passing	168.0	4
Total	294.1	4
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 9	- 0.64	110

MICHIGAN | WOLVERINES

Big Ten rank: 4 Record: 5-7 Big Ten record: 3-5 (T-4th, East) Stadium: Michigan Stadium (109,901)

RANKING 29

WOLVERINES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Ann Arbor, Mich.
COACH: Jim Harbaugh — At Michigan: 1st year; overall: 58-27, 7 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tim Drevno
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: D.J. Durkin

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2004
LAST BOWL: 2013, Buffalo Wild Wings
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 6 offense, 7 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Jake Rudock, RB Ty Isaac, RB Derrick Green, TE Jake Butt, WR Amara Darboh, DT Willie Henry, DE Chris Wormley, LB Joe Bolden, DB Jabrill Peppers

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The defense is full of experience, across the board — and that doesn't even account for Peppers, a potential game-changing safety. The defense should, again, be one of the best in the nation and give Big Ten foes fits. Program-wide, a jolt of Harbaugh is exactly what was needed.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Michigan will bring in a new face at quarterback (Rudock), but will it be enough? The Wolverines have struggled to run the ball in each of the last two seasons, and the team also has to replace its top receiver (Devin Funchess). Fixing a broken offense is, by far, the toughest task Harbaugh will face in year one.

DERRICK GREEN
Photo by Rick Osentoski-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Michigan's quarterback competition was the biggest on-field topic of conversation throughout the spring. It'll remain that way this summer, and probably won't change once fall rolls around, either.

Junior Shane Morris ended spring camp in front of freshman Alex Malzone and redshirt freshman Wilton Speight, but all three will be joined by Iowa grad transfer Jake Rudock. Morris, Malzone and Speight have combined for zero college touchdown passes. Rudock started the past two seasons at Iowa, throwing for 16 scores last year.

New Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh and passing game coordinator Jedd Fisch have put a massive emphasis on completion percentage and ball security. Rudock threw only five picks a year ago, finishing No. 2 in the Big Ten in completion rate (61.7 percent).

Michigan has a host of running backs to choose from (Derrick Green, Ty Isaac, De'Veon Smith and Drake Johnson) and five returning starters up front, but it'll be the quarterback who makes this offense go — or not. A year ago, Michigan quarterbacks had 10 touchdown passes compared to 18 interceptions and the offense sputtered to No. 112 overall at just 333.0 yards per game.

DEFENSE

D.J. Durkin takes over as coordinator, but former coordinator Greg Mattison is still on staff as the defensive line coach. Durkin, who spent the past five seasons at Florida, will implement a multiple-schemed attack, relying on both 3-4 and 4-3 sets.

And, he'll do so with some experience.

Michigan brings back 24 of the 28 players who appeared on the defensive two-deep a year ago, a unit that finished the year No. 7 nationally in total defense.

The team brings back senior starting linebackers Joe Bolden, James Ross and Desmond Morgan and gets touted redshirt freshman safety Jabrill Peppers back after an injury-shortened 2014 season.

> "I can have an impact on the game just by playing a lot of positions and with the enthusiasm I bring."
> — S Jabrill Peppers

The secondary's best cover corner, Jourdan Lewis, is back, though the team has to find a way to pick up more turnovers. Lewis' two interceptions were the only two picks made by a Michigan defensive back last season. Look for Stanford grad transfer Wayne Lyons to make an impact in the corner rotation, too.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Australian-born grad transfer Blake O'Neill averaged 44.1 yards per kick last season at Weber State; he likely will win the job this fall. Michigan's special teams were notoriously awful under Brady Hoke. Expect that to change, as Harbaugh has hired touted special teams expert John Baxter — one of the country's top special teams coaches for the past three decades.

OVERVIEW

The arrival of Harbaugh sent Michigan fans into a state of euphoria. Now, the reality: Michigan has to break in a new quarterback to a new system, and fix an offense that bottomed out last season. If Michigan can find a way to keep its talented defense out of no-win situations, the win total should rise in 2015. How much? Not high enough to catch Ohio State in the East. But second place can't be ruled out.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Brian Cole: The 6-2, 200-pound freshman — Michigan's top-rated recruit — participated in spring practice and got a head start at a position where the team needs plenty of help. Cole played running back, receiver, quarterback and defensive back in high school.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	NA	Jake Rudock	6-3	208	Sr.
RB	27	**Derrick Green***	5-11	234	Jr.
FB	36	Joe Kerridge	6-0	249	Sr.
WR	82	**Amara Darboh***	6-2	216	Sr.
WR	86	Jehu Chesson	6-3	207	Sr.
TE	88	Jake Butt	6-6	248	Jr.
LT	52	**Mason Cole***	6-5	287	So.
LG	71	**Ben Braden***	6-6	331	Sr.
C	61	**Graham Glasgow***	6-6	303	Sr.
RG	67	**Kyle Kalis***	6-5	292	Sr.
RT	78	Erik Magnuson	6-6	296	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	53	Mario Ojemudia	6-3	252	Sr.
NT	90	Bryan Mone	6-4	325	So.
DT	69	**Willie Henry***	6-2	311	Sr.
DE	43	**Chris Wormley***	6-4	300	Sr.
LB	15	**James Ross***	6-1	232	Sr.
LB	35	**Joe Bolden***	6-3	232	Sr.
LB	48	Desmond Morgan	6-1	236	Sr.
CB	2	**Blake Countess***	5-10	185	Sr.
CB	26	**Jourdan Lewis***	5-10	176	Jr.
SS	5	Jabrill Peppers	6-1	205	So.
FS	22	**Jarrod Wilson***	6-2	210	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	NA	Andrew David	5-9	170	Fr.
P	39	Blake O'Neill	6-2	215	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at Utah
Sept. 12	OREGON STATE
Sept. 19	UNLV
Sept. 26	BYU
Oct. 3	at Maryland
Oct. 10	NORTHWESTERN
Oct. 17	MICHIGAN STATE
Oct. 31	at Minnesota
Nov. 7	RUTGERS
Nov. 14	at Indiana
Nov. 21	at Penn State
Nov. 28	OHIO STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	APPALACHIAN STATE	52-14
L	at Notre Dame	0-31
W	MIAMI (OH)	34-10
L	UTAH	10-26
L	MINNESOTA	14-30
L	at Rutgers	24-26
W	PENN STATE	18-13
L	at Michigan State	11-35
W	INDIANA	34-10
W	at Northwestern	10-9
L	MARYLAND	16-23
L	at Ohio State	28-42

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
SScoring	20.9	109
Rushing	162.8	62
Passing	170.2	110
Total	333.0	112
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	22.4	27
Rushing	117.7	15
Passing	193.7	T-19
Total	311.3	7
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 16	- 1.33	T-121

NEBRASKA | HUSKERS

Big Ten rank: 5 Record: 9-4 Big Ten record: 5-3 (T-2nd, West) Stadium: Memorial (92,000)

RANKING 30

HUSKERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Lincoln, Neb.
COACH: Mike Riley — At Nebraska: 1st year; overall, 93-80, 14 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Danny Langsdorf
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mark Banker

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1999
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2007
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 6 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Tommy Armstrong Jr., WR De'Mornay Pierson-El, WR Jordan Westerkamp, TE Cethan Carter, DT Maliek Collins, DT Vincent Valentine, LB Michael Rose-Ivey, S Nathan Gerry

POTENTIAL STRENGTHS: Armstrong needs to improve his passing accuracy, but brings plenty of experience to the position. The front-line receivers are solid, with Pierson-El possessing plenty of star power as a returner and receiver. The front four has the potential to be one of best in the conference. The secondary is deep and experienced.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Depth at linebacker continues to be an on-going concern, although getting Michael Rose-Ivey back from a knee injury will be a big plus. The Huskers need to replace three starters on the offensive line and will have to rely on several running backs in an attempt to replace Ameer Abdullah, one of the most productive players in program history.

MALIEK COLLINS
Photo by Dennis Hubbard

"You don't go into something like this naive about what Nebraska football means and what the expectations are."
— Mike Riley

OFFENSE

Tommy Armstrong Jr. has guided Nebraska's offense for most of the past two seasons and is coming off a campaign in which he threw for 2,695 yards and accumulated 3,400 yards in total offense.

But Armstrong is a 52.9 percent career passer, and he's thrown 20 interceptions over the past two seasons. New coach Mike Riley, who ran a pro-style attack at Oregon State, stated during spring practice that one of the priorities is for the quarterbacks to improve their accuracy and cut down on interceptions.

Riley says he likes Armstrong's leadership ability, but that doesn't guarantee he's the starter. Ryker Fyfe and Johnny Stanton backed up Armstrong last season, and two redshirt freshmen — A.J. Bush and Zack Darlington — emerged as contenders during the spring.

After the departure of Ameer Abdullah, the Huskers still have plenty of options at running back with veterans Imani Cross and Terrell Newby, as well as newcomers Adam Taylor and Mikale Wilbon.

Likewise, Nebraska lost Kenny Bell, but returns proven performers at wide receiver in Jordan Westerkamp, Brandon Reilly and De'Mornay Pierson-El, and Jamal Turner is returning from injury. Cethan Carter has difference-making skills at tight end.

The Huskers return 10 lettermen on the line, but tackles Alex Lewis and Zach Sterup are the only ones with extensive starting experience.

DEFENSE

Nebraska's philosophy will get an overhaul under new coordinator Mark Banker, who believes in streamlining the scheme and unleashing his defenders to make plays.

Daniel Davie started all 13 games at cornerback last season, while Charles Jackson is coming back after being sidelined last season with a knee injury. Jackson figures to be in the mix at cornerback along with senior Jonathan Rose.

Safety Nate Gerry earned All-Big Ten honors and led the team in interceptions with five. Byerson Cockrell saw extensive action at safety and nickel back in 2014.

The strength of Banker's first defense should be up front where the Huskers return three starters — end Greg McMullen, and tackles Maliek Collins and Vincent Valentine. Collins, a second-team All-Big Ten selection as a sophomore, led Nebraska in tackles for losses.

Depth is a concern at linebacker, where Nebraska had just six scholarship players practicing in the spring. Josh Banderas established himself in the middle, while Michael Rose-Ivey appears healthy after sitting out last season with a knee injury.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Pierson-El returned three punts for touchdowns last season and led the nation in return yardage. Kicker Drew Brown set a school scoring record for points by a freshman (101), breaking the mark set by his older brother, Kris. Third-year starter Sam Foltz averaged 42.2 yards per punt last season.

OVERVIEW

The Riley era begins with equal degrees of optimism and skepticism. The Huskers are blessed with enough talent to again contend for a spot in the conference championship game. Can Riley take that talent and do what the previous regime couldn't? This is a win-now kind of job.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB Dedrick Young: The early-enrolled true freshman will need to add size and strength during the summer, but he showed outstanding instincts in earning a spot on the two-deep this spring. He twice earned All-Arizona honors while starring as a running back and linebacker for Peoria Centennial High.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	4	**Tommy Armstrong Jr.***	6-1	220	Jr.
RB	34	Terrell Newby	5-10	200	Jr.
WR	1	**Jordan Westerkamp***	6-0	195	Jr.
WR	15	**De'Mornay Pierson-El***	5-9	185	So.
WR	87	Brandon Reilly	6-1	195	Jr.
TE	11	**Cethan Carter***	6-4	240	Jr.
LT	71	**Alex Lewis***	6-6	290	Sr.
LG	66	Dylan Utter	6-1	285	Jr.
C	65	Ryne Reeves	6-3	300	Sr.
RG	70	Chongo Kondolo	6-4	300	Sr.
RT	57	**Zach Sterup***	6-8	320	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	90	**Greg McMullen***	6-3	280	Jr.
DT	98	**Vincent Valentine***	6-3	320	Jr.
DT	7	**Maliek Collins***	6-2	300	Jr.
DE	95	Jack Gangwish	6-2	265	Sr.
LB	15	Michael Rose-Ivey	5-11	240	Jr.
LB	52	Josh Banderas	6-2	235	Jr.
LB	41	**David Santos***	6-0	225	Sr.
CB	23	**Daniel Davie***	6-1	190	Sr.
CB	14	Jonathan Rose	6-1	195	Sr.
S	25	**Nate Gerry***	6-2	205	Jr.
S	28	Byerson Cockrell	6-0	185	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	34	**Drew Brown***	5-11	180	So.
P	27	**Sam Foltz***	6-1	200	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	BYU
Sept. 12	SOUTH ALABAMA
Sept. 19	at Miami
Sept. 26	SOUTHERN MISS
Oct. 3	at Illinois
Oct. 10	WISCONSIN
Oct. 17	at Minnesota
Oct. 24	NORTHWESTERN
Oct. 31	at Purdue
Nov. 7	MICHIGAN STATE
Nov. 14	at Rutgers
Nov. 27	IOWA

2014 RESULTS

W	FAU	55-7
W	McNEESE STATE	31-24
W	at Fresno State	55-19
W	MIAMI	41-31
W	ILLINOIS	45-14
L	at Michigan State	22-27
W	at Northwestern	38-17
W	RUTGERS	42-24
W	PURDUE	35-14
L	at Wisconsin	24-59
L	MINNESOTA	24-28
W	at Iowa (OT)	37-24
	Holiday Bowl	
L	vs. USC	42-45

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	37.8	12
Rushing	240.2	17
Passing	212.1	80
Total	452.3	31
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	26.4	59
Rushing	177.8	78
Passing	205.8	32
Total	383.6	52
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 2	- 0.15	T-73

PENN STATE | NITTANY LIONS

Big Ten rank: 6 Record: 7-6 Big Ten record: 2-6 (6th, East) Stadium: Beaver Stadium (106,572)

RANKING 41

NITTANY LIONS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: University Park, Pa.
COACH: James Franklin — At Penn State: 7-6, 1 year; overall: 31-21, 4 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: John Donovan
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Bob Shoop

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2008, co-champions
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 16; 8 offense, 7 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Christian Hackenberg, RB Akeel Lynch, WR DaeSean Hamilton, WR Geno Lewis, DT Austin Johnson, DT Anthony Zettel, LB Nyeem Wartman, S Jordan Lucas

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Hackenberg is a franchise quarterback who will have more experience around him than he did last year. Lynch and the receivers are playmakers. Defensively, Johnson and Zettel rank with any set of tackles in the Big Ten. The secondary is as strong as it's been in several years.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Once again, the offense's success hinges on the line, which allowed 44 sacks last year. On defense, Wartman will move from outside linebacker to the middle to try to fill the big void left by Mike Hull. Finding a new kicker might be more difficult than expected.

ANTHONY ZETTEL
Photo by Randy Litzinger Icon Sportswire via AP Images

OFFENSE

Christian Hackenberg ended last season with perhaps the best performance of his career. He passed for 371 yards and four touchdowns in Penn State's overtime win over Boston College in the Pinstripe Bowl.

During the regular season, though, Hackenberg struggled behind an inexperienced line, getting sacked 44 times and throwing 15 interceptions. It was also his first season under a new coaching staff.

The hope is that with greater comfort in the system and more support around him this year, Hackenberg will be free to show that NFL arm everyone has been talking about for the past two seasons.

He definitely will have help in the backfield. Akeel Lynch, after he was Penn State's top rusher last season (678 yards), gets his first chance to be the lead running back.

At wide receiver, DaeSean Hamilton led the Big Ten in receptions with 82, and Geno Lewis had 55. Chris Godwin could be a breakout player. Kyle Carter is the top returner at tight end, which might be the team's deepest position.

Up front, Angelo Mangiro, Brendan Mahon, Brian Gaia and Andrew Nelson return as starters after struggling as a group last year.

DEFENSE

Penn State returns seven starters on defense, but its most important returner might be coordinator Bob Shoop. If Shoop had left for LSU, Penn State would have had its fifth defensive coordinator in as many years.

Coach James Franklin said the biggest challenge the Lions face is replacing Mike Hull, the Big Ten Linebacker of the Year in 2014. Nyeem Wartman will take on that challenge by moving from the outside to middle linebacker.

Anthony Zettel, a first-team All-Big Ten pick last season, and Austin Johnson, who easily could have been an all-conference pick, are two of the best defensive tackles in the conference. Carl Nassib and Garrett Sickels are the leading candidates to succeed Deion Barnes and C.J. Olaniyan at end.

> "When you get hit that much, you start falling into bad habits."
> — James Franklin, on Christian Hackenberg's sophomore season

Brandon Bell returns on the strong side, and Jason Cabinda or Troy Reeder probably will start on the weak side.

In the secondary, Jordan Lucas will move from cornerback to safety, where he'll team with Marcus Allen, who had a terrific freshman season. Trevor Williams returns at one corner. Grant Haley and Christian Campbell, who saw extensive time as true freshmen, will compete to be the other cornerback.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Penn State's special teams made considerable improvement last year, but Franklin wants them to be among the best in the Big Ten. Replacing Sam Ficken, who made 24 of 29 field goal attempts, will be the biggest issue. Joey Julius is the top candidate.

OVERVIEW

Penn State has more experience and more depth than it's had in a while. If Hackenberg receives time, he can be as good a passer as there is in the Big Ten. Don't expect a drop-off from the defense. The Lions will make progress in Franklin's second season.

TOP NEWCOMER

OT Paris Palmer: From Lackawanna Junior College in Pennsylvania, he was rated the top JC offensive tackle in the nation last year. Chose Penn State over Arizona State, Baylor, Miami, Ohio State and South Carolina.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	14	**Christian Hackenberg***	6-4	236	Jr.
RB	22	Akeel Lynch	6-0	220	Jr.
WR	7	**Geno Lewis***	6-1	206	Jr.
WR	5	**DaeSean Hamilton***	6-1	211	So.
TE	87	**Kyle Carter***	6-3	240	Sr.
TE	88	Mike Gesicki	6-6	255	So.
LT	73	Paris Palmer	6-7	278	Jr.
LG	70	**Brendan Mahon***	6-4	316	So.
C	66	**Angelo Mangiro***	6-3	315	Sr.
RG	72	**Brian Gaia***	6-3	301	Jr.
RT	59	**Andrew Nelson***	6-5	310	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	95	Carl Nassib	6-6	270	Sr.
DT	98	**Anthony Zettel***	6-4	278	Sr.
DT	99	**Austin Johnson***	6-4	325	Jr.
DE	90	Garrett Sickels	6-4	262	So.
LB	11	**Brandon Bell***	6-1	231	Jr.
LB	5	**Nyeem Wartman***	6-1	243	Jr.
LB	40	Jason Cabinda	6-1	247	So.
CB	10	Trevor Williams*	6-1	196	Sr.
CB	15	Grant Haley	5-9	186	So.
SS	9	**Jordan Lucas***	6-0	199	Sr.
FS	2	**Marcus Allen***	6-2	206	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	99	Joey Julius	5-11	244	Fr.
P	92	**Daniel Pasquariello***	6-0	204	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Temple
Sept. 12	BUFFALO
Sept. 19	RUTGERS
Sept. 26	SAN DIEGO STATE
Oct. 3	ARMY
Oct. 10	INDIANA
Oct. 17	at Ohio State
Oct. 24	vs. Maryland (Baltimore, MD)
Oct. 31	ILLINOIS
Nov. 7	at Northwestern
Nov. 21	MICHIGAN
Nov. 28	at Michigan State

2014 RESULTS

W	vs. UCF (Dublin, Ireland)	26-24
W	AKRON	21-3
W	at Rutgers	13-10
W	MASSACHUSETTS	48-7
L	NORTHWESTERN	6-29
L	at Michigan	13-18
L	OHIO STATE (2OT)	24-31
L	MARYLAND	19-20
W	at Indiana	13-7
W	TEMPLE	30-13
L	at Illinois	14-16
L	MICHIGAN STATE	10-34
	Pinstripe Bowl	
W	vs. Boston College (OT)	31-30

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	20.6	110
Rushing	101.9	117
Passing	233.4	61
Total	335.3	111
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	18.6	7
Rushing	100.5	3
Passing	178.2	9
Total	278.7	2
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 5	- 0.38	T-95

IOWA | HAWKEYES

Big Ten rank: 7 Record: 7-6 Big Ten record: 4-4 (4th, West) Stadium: Kinnick Stadium (70,585)

RANKING 48

HAWKEYES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Iowa City, Iowa
COACH: Kirk Ferentz — At Iowa: 115-85, 16 years; overall: 127-106, 19 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Greg Davis
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Phil Parker

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2004, co-champions
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 4 offense, 6 defense, punter, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB C.J. Beathard, RB Jordan Canzeri, RB LeShun Daniels Jr., WR Tevaun Smith, DE Drew Ott, DT Jaleel Johnson, DE Nate Meier, S Jordan Lomax

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Beathard has a lot of what you want in a quarterback. Smith could put up big numbers as a senior. The defensive line has potential to be strong inside and provide pass rush on the outside. Experience at safety and linebacker should help some of the problems Iowa had defending the perimeter last season.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The lack of playmakers on offense is a problem. The fact that TE Jake Duzey suffered a knee injury during spring practice is a big setback. During spring practice, the offensive line was poor in pass protection and didn't establish a running game against the No. 1 defense. The linebacker corps has a ton to prove. Punter is a potential hot spot.

DESMOND KING
Photo by Tamasson DeRosa

OFFENSE

Kirk Ferentz, in a first-ever move in his 17 years as Iowa's head coach, issued a depth chart in January. He tagged C.J. Beathard as the starter and let Jake Rudock — a two-year starter — know the decision was final. Plan accordingly.

Rudock graduated from Iowa and then transferred to Michigan.

Beathard, a junior, showed glimpses last season in a comeback victory at Pittsburgh and a road win the next week at Purdue. He has a strong arm and quick release. In limited action, Beathard had three of Iowa's top-10 long plays last season.

Beathard also has shown speed and a knack for running the ball. All of this will be explored.

The real battle on offense is along the line, specifically the tackle spots, more specifically how to replace Outland Trophy winner Brandon Scherff at left tackle. Sophomore Boone Myers will try. He's a former walk-on who was awarded a scholarship coming out of camp last fall.

Iowa has a huge need for playmakers. Senior wide receiver Tevaun Smith is No. 1 on the list. Tight end Jake Duzey might have been there, but he suffered a knee injury in spring practice and could be out until October.

At running back, senior Jordan Canzeri is No. 1a and junior LeShun Daniels, who has a chance to fill a big-back role, is No. 1b.

DEFENSE

Iowa has to replace two standouts at defensive tackle in Carl Davis and Louis Trinca-Pasat.

Junior Jaleel Johnson has shown the power to hold the point of attack on the inside. Sophomore Nathan Bazata has a chance to turn his high school wrestling skills into a high-level performance at defensive tackle. Defensive ends Drew Ott and Nate Meier are three- and two-year starters, respectively. Ott has 10.5 career sacks.

Sophomores Josey Jewell and Ben Niemann solidified spots on the inside and at outside linebacker.

"It's imperative for us — if we are going to have a good football team — to have everyone improve."

— Kirk Ferentz

Seniors Travis Perry and Cole Fisher and sophomore Bo Bower are in the mix for the other inside spot.

Iowa's secondary should be among its strengths. Junior Desmond King holds down the boundary corner spot. Junior Greg Mabin had ups and downs in his first season as a starter, but he is still a 6-2 corner who can run. Senior Jordan Lomax will be in his second season as starter at free safety.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Dillon Kidd led the punting competition after the spring, even though he fell out of the starter's spot last season. Senior kicker Marshall Koehn also is in the mix. He made 12 of 16 field goal attempts last season, including a long of 52 yards. He finished second in the Big Ten with 43 touchbacks.

OVERVIEW

New offensive tackles, unproven defense that needs to improve, a running game that doesn't have bona fide firepower; this is an Iowa team that is running uphill. After five unremarkable seasons, Ferentz is taking heat. Buyout or not, this might be the last stand.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Jerminic Smith: Iowa needs wide receivers that can make plays, and Smith looks like he fits the bill. Said Iowa recruiting coordinator Seth Wallace: "Jerminic is more of a true wide receiver. We had to fight like hell for him. … Great route runner; he's got good size."

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	16	C.J. Beathard	6-2	209	Jr.
RB	33	Jordan Canzeri	5-9	192	Sr.
FB	42	Macon Plewa	6-2	244	Sr.
WR	**4**	**Tevaun Smith***	**6-2**	**205**	**Sr.**
WR	89	Matt VandeBerg	6-1	185	Jr.
TE	80	Henry Krieger Coble	6-4	250	Sr.
LT	52	Boone Myers	6-5	300	So.
LG	58	Eric Simmons	6-2	295	Sr.
C	**63**	**Austin Blythe***	**6-3**	**290**	**Sr.**
RG	**65**	**Jordan Walsh***	**6-4**	**290**	**Sr.**
RT	75	Ike Boettger	6-6	300	So.

DEFENSE

DE	**34**	**Nate Meier***	**6-2**	**252**	**Sr.**
DT	67	Jaleel Johnson	6-4	310	Jr.
DT	99	Nathan Bazata	6-2	284	So.
DE	**95**	**Drew Ott***	**6-4**	**272**	**Sr.**
LB	44	Ben Niemann	6-3	225	So.
LB	43	Josey Jewell	6-2	230	So.
LB	**41**	**Bo Bower***	**6-1**	**228**	**So.**
CB	**13**	**Greg Mabin***	**6-2**	**200**	**Jr.**
CB	**14**	**Desmond King***	**5-11**	**200**	**Jr.**
SS	19	Miles Taylor	6-0	195	So.
FS	**27**	**Jordan Lomax***	**5-10**	**205**	**Sr.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**1**	**Marshall Koehn***	**6-0**	**200**	**Sr.**
P	**16**	**Dillon Kidd***	**6-2**	**215**	**Sr.**

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	ILLINOIS STATE
Sept. 12	at Iowa State
Sept. 19	PITTSBURGH
Sept. 26	NORTH TEXAS
Oct. 3	at Wisconsin
Oct. 10	ILLINOIS
Oct. 17	at Northwestern
Oct. 31	MARYLAND
Nov. 7	at Indiana
Nov. 14	MINNESOTA
Nov. 21	PURDUE
Nov. 27	at Nebraska

2014 RESULTS

W	NORTHERN IOWA	31-23
W	BALL STATE	17-13
L	IOWA STATE	17-20
W	at Pittsburgh	24-20
W	at Purdue	24-10
W	INDIANA	45-29
L	at Maryland	31-38
W	NORTHWESTERN	48-7
L	at Minnesota	14-51
W	at Illinois	30-14
L	WISCONSIN	24-26
L	NEBRASKA (OT)	34-37
	Taxslayer Bowl	
L	vs. Tennessee	28-45

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	28.2	68
Rushing	163.1	61
Passing	237.0	55
Total	400.1	63
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.6	50
Rushing	168.3	64
Passing	175.9	7
Total	344.2	22
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 6	- 0.46	102

MINNESOTA | GOPHERS

Big Ten rank: 8 Record: 8-5 Big Ten record: 5-3 (T-2nd, West)Stadium: TCF Bank Stadium (50,805)

RANKING 50

GOPHERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Minneapolis, Minn.
COACH: Jerry Kill — At Minnesota: 25-26, 4 years; overall: 152-99, 21 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Matt Limegrover
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tracy Claeys

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1967, co-champions
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2011
RETURNING STARTERS: 18; 8 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Mitch Leidner, RB/WR Jeff Jones, CB Eric Murray, TE Duke Anyanwu, S Damarius Travis, DE Theiren Cockran

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: A senior-led secondary will be stingy after Minnesota finished with the fourth-best pass defense in the Big Ten last season. Leidner should be more comfortable this season. Minnesota gets West rivals Nebraska and Wisconsin at home.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Minnesota lost its two biggest weapons on offense — RB David Cobb and TE Maxx Williams — and needs an explosive threat to help Leidner. The Gophers get no break-in time; they open the season at home against TCU and then travel to Colorado State.

BRIEAN BODDY-CALHOUN
Photo by Steve Beyer

OFFENSE

In quarterback Mitch Leidner's first full season as the starter, Minnesota finished second-to-last in passing in the Big Ten, averaging a mere 141.8 yards per game.

The offense was geared more toward the run, of course, but the offense needs more passing consistency, the kind Leidner displayed in the Citrus Bowl, when he matched Adam Weber's school record of 14 consecutive completions.

Most of those throws were short passes, though, as the downfield threat remains something lacking in the Gophers' attack. Minnesota hopes the installation of some hurry-up offense can help Leidner get into an easier rhythm.

One of the most intriguing players on offense could be redshirt freshman Jeff Jones. Heralded as one of the top recruits in the state of Minnesota two years ago, Jones didn't play in 2014 because of academic issues. He saw time at slot receiver and running back this spring as Minnesota looks for a way to get him the ball.

Minnesota is young at wide receiver, but boasts tall, promising redshirt freshmen who could make an impact — 6-4 Isaiah Gentry, 6-3 Melvin Holland Jr. and 6-3 Desmond Gant. All should see playing time behind senior KJ Maye and junior Drew Wolitarsky.

DEFENSE

The secondary will again be the strength of the defense as Minnesota should start four seniors in the defensive backfield.

That includes lockdown cornerback Eric Murray, who doesn't put up eye-popping stats simply because teams have started to avoid throwing in his direction. Murray will have a chance to play at the next level.

Joining Murray in the secondary are cornerback Briean Boddy-Calhoun, and safeties Damarius Travis and Antonio Johnson. Boddy-Calhoun is the vocal leader of the group, but he also led by example last year, as his five interceptions were tops on the team.

Travis and Johnson are physical safeties who like to hit and rarely get caught out of position.

"We've got as much depth at the D-line since we've been here."
— Defensive coordinator Tracy Claeys

Minnesota appears deep at linebacker. Senior De'Vondre Campbell returns with plenty of experience, as does junior Jack Lynn. Cody Poock, a former transfer from Iowa Western, missed last year with an ACL injury, but he was flying around the field in the spring. Coaches call Jonathan Celestin "Thumper" for his big-hit ability.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Peter Mortell is back after averaging 45.1 yards per punt and earning Big Ten Punter of the Year honors. Speedy cornerback Jalen Myrick is the Gophers' top threat in the return game. He returned a kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown against Northwestern in 2014.

OVERVIEW

The Gophers lose only a few starters on each side of the ball, but they were key contributors. Finding a way to replace several NFL-caliber players won't be easy, but Minnesota believes it has enough depth to make up for it. The confidence continues to grow for the Gophers, who believe they can compete with the best in the Big Ten West.

TOP NEWCOMER

CB Charles "Ace" Rogers: He transferred from Iowa Western, where he made 73 tackles and two interceptions last season. Rogers began his career at Iowa State and played in 12 games in 2013 before leaving. He should see time in nickel packages and as a backup cornerback.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	7	**Mitch Leidner***	6-4	236	Jr.
RB	35	Rodrick Williams Jr.	5-11	229	Sr.
RB	32	Berkley Edwards	5-9	192	So.
WR	82	**Drew Wolitarsky***	6-3	217	Jr.
WR	1	**KJ Maye***	5-10	199	Sr.
TE	81	Duke Anyanwu	6-4	239	Jr.
LT	78	**Ben Lauer***	6-7	314	Jr.
LG	73	**Joe Bjorklund***	6-5	296	Sr.
C	67	Brian Bobek	6-2	297	Sr.
RG	65	**Josh Campion***	6-5	310	Sr.
RT	79	**Jonah Pirsig***	6-9	324	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	55	**Theiren Cockran***	6-6	257	Sr.
DT	96	**Steven Richardson***	6-0	291	So.
DT	99	Andrew Stelter	6-4	269	So.
DE	95	Hendrick Ekpe	6-5	244	Jr.
LB	26	**De'Vondre Campbell***	6-5	241	Sr.
LB	57	Everett Williams	6-1	235	So.
LB	50	**Jack Lynn***	6-3	240	Jr.
CB	31	**Eric Murray***	6-0	196	Sr.
CB	29	**Briean Boddy-Calhoun***	5-11	188	Sr.
S	7	**Damarius Travis***	6-2	215	Sr.
S	11	**Antonio Johnson***	6-0	211	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	18	**Ryan Santoso***	6-6	245	So.
P	37	**Peter Mortell***	6-2	191	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	TCU
Sept. 12	at Colorado State
Sept. 19	KENT STATE
Sept. 26	OHIO
Oct. 3	at Northwestern
Oct. 10	at Purdue
Oct. 17	NEBRASKA
Oct. 31	MICHIGAN
Nov. 7	at Ohio State
Nov. 14	at Iowa
Nov. 21	ILLINOIS
Nov. 28	WISCONSIN

2014 RESULTS

W	EASTERN ILLINOIS	42-20
W	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	35-24
L	at TCU	7-30
W	SAN JOSE STATE	24-7
W	at Michigan	30-14
W	NORTHWESTERN	24-17
W	PURDUE	39-38
L	at Illinois	24-28
W	IOWA	51-14
L	OHIO STATE	24-31
W	at Nebraska	28-24
L	at Wisconsin	24-34
	Citrus Bowl	
L	vs. Missouri	17-33

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	28.4	66
Rushing	215.5	28
Passing	141.8	119
Total	357.3	103
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.2	T-33
Rushing	174.7	74
Passing	193.5	18
Total	368.2	39
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 10	+ 0.77	15

RUTGERS | SCARLET KNIGHTS

Big Ten rank: 9 Record: 8-5 Big Ten record: 3-5 (4th, East) Stadium: High Point Solutions (52,454)

RANKING 58

SCARLET KNIGHTS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Piscataway, N.J.
COACH: Kyle Flood — At Rutgers and overall: 23-16, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Ben McDaniels
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Joe Rossi

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: None
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2010
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 5 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Chris Laviano, QB Hayden Rettig, RB Robert Martin, RB Josh Hicks, WR Leonte Carroo, DT Darius Hamilton, OLB Steve Longa, S Kiy Hester, PK Kyle Federico

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Rutgers has proven running backs and a very good possession receiver in Carroo. There is young talent on the offensive line with Marcus Applefield and Dorian Miller. The front four on defense will be active, and there is young talent in the secondary.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Whether it is Laviano or Rettig playing quarterback, experience is an issue. Young quarterbacks need to play and learn from mistakes, and big mistakes can be too tough for Rutgers to overcome. Also, new offensive coordinator McDaniels will be calling the plays for the first time, and he lacks experience. On defense, the Scarlet Knights still are not Big Ten big in the trenches.

DARIUS HAMILTON
Photo by AP Photo/Carlos Osorio

OFFENSE

Will it be Chris Laviano or Hayden Rettig leading the offense?

That question will be answered in camp, but for the first time in four years there will be no calls for Gary Nova, who graduated after a strong senior season. Laviano can throw on the run and got spot playing time in 2014, while the strong-armed Rettig sat out after transferring from LSU.

The Scarlet Knights have a proven receiver in Leonte Carroo, who returned for his senior year after looking at the NFL. The Scarlet Knights need someone to take pressure off him — perhaps Ruhann Peele, who is returning from an injury and then a suspension. He missed last season. Other options: Carlton Agudosi, Janarion Grant or Andre Patton.

As last season wore on, Carroo had more difficulty getting behind defenses, which often used a safety over the top to keep him in check. The Scarlet Knights did lose tight end Tyler Kroft, who left a year early and was drafted in the third round.

The running game is proven with Robert Martin and Josh Hicks, both of whom topped the 100-yard mark in games last season, but the line will need to be finalized.

DEFENSE

The tackle tandem of Darius Hamilton and Sebastian Joseph is formidable. The biggest question with Hamilton, who is very good with his technique, is that he is still undersized to play in the Big Ten trenches.

The Scarlet Knights have plenty of depth at the line of scrimmage, but that is not the case at linebacker.

Rutgers brought in a pair of middle linebackers to help. Isaiah Johnson, from City College of San Francisco, played well in the spring. He will be challenged in camp by Kaiwan Lewis, who prepped in South Jersey, played for three seasons at South Carolina and is set to enroll at Rutgers in late July as a graduate transfer.

Steve Longa returns for a second season at weak-side linebacker; he said transitioning from middle linebacker was more difficult than he thought.

> "When you break 19 all-time records (in the weight room), that tells me that we're moving in the right direction as a program."
>
> — Kyle Flood

Nadir Barnwell remains in the mix to start at one cornerback slot, but Dre Boggs and true freshman Blessuan Austin could wind up being the starters. Both are long and run well, with the strength and attitude to play corner.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punting consistency was a problem. Training camp will continue to serve as a battleground for Joe Roth and Tim Gleeson. Place-kicker Kyle Federico returns after making 16 of 21 field goal attempts, including 11 of 12 from inside 40 yards.

OVERVIEW

The season will be defined by the quarterback play and a tough stretch in October in which the Scarlet Knights host Ohio State, play at Wisconsin, at Michigan and host Nebraska on four straight Saturdays. If Laviano or Rettig can be consistent and not turn the ball over too much, the defense should be able to make enough plays for Rutgers to make hay in the other eight games.

TOP NEWCOMER

CB Blessuan Austin: He enrolled in January after spending a post-graduate season at New Berlin (N.Y.) Milford Academy, where he had eight pass break-ups and three interceptions. Austin put himself in contention for a starting role after a strong spring.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	5	Chris Laviano	6-3	210	So.
RB	**7**	**Robert Martin***	**6-0**	**200**	**So.**
FB	44	Sam Bergen	6-0	235	Sr.
WR	**4**	**Leonte Carroo***	**6-1**	**205**	**Sr.**
WR	**88**	**Andre Patton***	**6-4**	**200**	**Jr.**
TE	42	Nick Arcidiacono	6-5	235	So.
LT	**74**	**Keith Lumpkin***	**6-8**	**310**	**Sr.**
LG	60	Dorian Miller	6-3	285	So.
C	69	Derrick Nelson	6-3	290	Jr.
RG	**70**	**Chris Muller***	**6-6**	**300**	**Jr.**
RT	77	J.J. Denman	6-6	300	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	22	Quanzell Lambert	6-1	250	Sr.
DT	**51**	**Sebastian Joseph***	**6-4**	**285**	**So.**
DT	**91**	**Darius Hamilton***	**6-4**	**255**	**Sr.**
DE	**93**	**Dwany Mera***	**6-4**	**260**	**Jr.**
LB	**3**	**Steve Longa***	**6-1**	**225**	**Jr.**
LB	8	Kaiwan Lewis	6-0	228	Jr.
LB	**50**	**Quentin Gause***	**6-1**	**220**	**Sr.**
CB	10	Blessuan Austin	6-1	180	Fr.
CB	24	Dre Boggs	5-11	175	So.
SS	2	Kiy Hester	6-0	205	Fr.
FS	27	Delon Stephenson	5-11	190	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	**1**	**Kyle Federico***	**6-0**	**190**	**Sr.**
P	**99**	**Tim Gleeson***	**6-2**	**195**	**Sr.**

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	NORFOLK STATE
Sept. 12	WASHINGTON STATE
Sept. 19	at Penn State
Sept. 26	KANSAS
Oct. 10	MICHIGAN STATE
Oct. 17	at Indiana
Oct. 24	OHIO STATE
Oct. 31	at Wisconsin
Nov. 7	at Michigan
Nov. 14	NEBRASKA
Nov. 21	at Army
Nov. 28	MARYLAND

2014 RESULTS

W	vs. Washington State (Seattle, WA)	41-38
W	HOWARD	38-25
L	PENN STATE	10-13
W	at Navy	31-24
W	TULANE	31-6
W	MICHIGAN	26-24
L	at Ohio State	17-56
L	at Nebraska	24-42
L	WISCONSIN	0-37
W	INDIANA	45-23
L	at Michigan State	3-45
W	at Maryland	41-38
	Quick Lane Bowl	
W	vs. North Carolina	40-21

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	26.7	80
Rushing	162.6	63
Passing	227.4	68
Total	390.0	73
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	30.2	87
Rushing	212.3	106
Passing	230.5	69
Total	442.8	98
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
-2	-0.15	T-73

MARYLAND | TERRAPINS

Big Ten rank: 10 Record: 7-6 Big Ten record: 4-4 (3rd, East) Stadium: Byrd Stadium (54,000)

RANKING 61

TERRAPINS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: College Park, Md.
COACH: Randy Edsall — At Maryland: 20-30, 4 years; overall: 94-100, 16 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Locksley
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Keith Dudzinski

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2001, ACC
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 10; 5 offense, 4 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Caleb Rowe, WR Levern Jacobs, LT Derwin Gray, DE Yannick Ngakoue, LB Abner Logan, CB Will Likely, CB Sean Davis, K Brad Craddock

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: There's experience and depth at the skill positions; the offensive line should be bigger and better, particularly if Gray is healthy. The new 4-3 defense is better fit for personnel. The cornerbacks are top notch, allowing for more man-to-man coverage. Craddock is one of the best kickers in the country.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Rowe has played in just 13 games in three years and has never finished a season because of injuries. Someone — anyone? — has to replace the explosiveness of WR Stefon Diggs. Only one starter returns in the defensive front seven, and everyone is still trying to master the 4-3 after a scheme switch.

YANNICK NGAKOUE
Photo by Tomasso DeRosa

OFFENSE

Junior quarterback Caleb Rowe takes over as the starter, and he has the arm to open up the passing game.

Rowe's strengths may take Maryland away from the read-option attack, at least the part where the quarterback leads the team in rushing, as departed C.J. Brown did last season. Rowe, who attempted 54 passes in 2014, is much better served in the pocket, targeting Terrapins downfield.

And the Terps do have a ton of targets, with seniors Marcus Leak and Levern Jacobs, and up-and-coming Juwann Winfree and Tavion Jacobs.

A quartet of running backs, headlined by senior Brandon Ross and junior Wes Brown, also return, but Maryland has to improve its abysmal average of 3.7 yards per rush.

The offensive line emphasis has gone away from quick-footed, agile linemen to behemoths that can better battle Big Ten bullies. More push up front could come from big redshirt freshmen tackles Derwin Gray and Damian Prince, along with returning starters Andrew Zeller and Ryan Doyle.

Maryland has depth and experience along the line for the first time in a long time.

DEFENSE

New coordinator Keith Dudzinski is shifting the Terrapins out of the 3-4 and into a more beef-over-the-ball 4-3. Maryland allowed more than 200 yards a game rushing and was 95th nationally in total defense.

The Terrapins have only one starter back in the front seven, so they might as well try something different.

That one starter, linebacker Yannick Ngakoue is moving to end and he still looks like a terror after leading the team with 13.5 tackles for loss last season. High-motor Roman Braglio mans the other end spot, and blossoming David Shaw is the other tackle. End Quinton Jefferson has moved inside.

Middle linebacker Jermaine Carter Jr. stepped up in the spring to take charge. Weakside linebacker Abner Logan could be a star.

"You'll see some bigger, thicker (Terrapins) than you have seen before."
— Randy Edsall, on his recruiting emphasis

The secondary is a primary strength with All-Big Ten corner Will Likely back along with hard-hitting safety Anthony Nixon. The talented Sean Davis is moving from safety to corner. Likely intercepted six passes last season, taking two back for touchdowns.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Brad Craddock hit 18 of 19 field goal attempts last year, including a school-record 57-yarder against Ohio State, as the Aussie won the Lou Groza Award. He has converted 81.7 percent of his field goal tries over his career. The punting game is not so steady. Freshman Lee Shrader likely will try to improve on a perennial Terrapin weakness.

Likely led the Big Ten with a 31.0-yard average on kick returns and was third at 11.1 yards per punt return.

OVERVIEW

The Terrapins overachieved in their first go-round in the Big Ten. The conference looks tougher this year, and Maryland is minus more than a dozen starters, including do-it-all quarterback C.J. Brown, so just holding its position in the East won't be easy. But if Caleb Rowe is the proven passer he has shown in his limited sampling, the Terps are capable of doing just that.

TOP NEWCOMER

LT Derwin Gray: He redshirted last year because of a shoulder injury after coming in as highly acclaimed recruit. At 6-5, 315 pounds, he is the embodiment of the Terrapins' new commitment to size and strength up front. Gray was the consensus top prospect out of Washington, D.C., in 2013 before he prepped a season at Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	7	Caleb Rowe	6-3	215	Sr.
RB	**45**	**Brandon Ross***	**5-10**	**205**	**Sr.**
WR	**82**	**Marcus Leak***	**6-0**	**214**	**Sr.**
WR	81	Juwann Winfree	6-2	210	So.
WR	8	Levern Jacobs	5-11	185	Sr.
TE	44	Andrew Isaacs	6-2	240	Jr.
LT	75	Derwin Gray	6-5	315	Fr.
LG	**55**	**Ryan Doyle***	**6-4**	**307**	**Sr.**
C	60	Stephen Grommer	6-5	306	Sr.
RG	**66**	**Andrew Zeller***	**6-5**	**315**	**Sr.**
RT	58	Damian Prince	6-3	325	Fr.

DEFENSE

DE	**7**	**Yannick Ngakoue***	**6-2**	**250**	**Jr.**
DT	67	David Shaw	6-4	308	So.
DT	99	Quinton Jefferson	6-3	287	Sr.
DE	90	Roman Braglio	6-3	267	Jr.
LB	46	Abner Logan	6-1	240	Jr.
LB	23	Jermaine Carter Jr.	6-0	240	So.
LB	43	Jalen Brooks	6-2	234	So.
CB	**21**	**Sean Davis***	**6-1**	**200**	**Sr.**
CB	**4**	**Will Likely***	**5-7**	**175**	**Jr.**
S	**20**	**Anthony Nixon***	**6-0**	**205**	**Sr.**
S	19	A.J. Hendy	6-1	207	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**15**	**Brad Craddock***	**6-0**	**189**	**Sr.**
P	38	Lee Shrader	6-2	224	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	RICHMOND
Sept. 12	BOWLING GREEN
Sept. 19	SOUTH FLORIDA
Sept. 26	at West Virginia
Oct. 3	MICHIGAN
Oct. 10	at Ohio State
Oct. 24	vs. Penn State (Baltimore, MD)
Oct. 31	at Iowa
Nov. 7	WISCONSIN
Nov. 14	at Michigan State
Nov. 21	INDIANA
Nov. 28	at Rutgers

2014 RESULTS

W	JAMES MADISON	52-7
W	at South Florida	24-17
L	WEST VIRGINIA	37-40
W	at Syracuse	34-20
W	at Indiana	37-15
L	OHIO STATE	24-52
W	IOWA	38-31
L	at Wisconsin	7-52
W	at Penn State	20-19
L	MICHIGAN STATE	15-37
W	at Michigan	23-16
L	RUTGERS	38-41
	Foster Farms Bowl	
L	vs. Stanford	21-45

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	28.5	65
Rushing	121.8	108
Passing	220.2	72
Total	342.1	109
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	30.2	T-87
Rushing	201.9	97
Passing	234.3	78
Total	436.2	95
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 0	+ 0.00	T-59

ILLINOIS | FIGHTING ILLINI

Big Ten rank: 11 Record: 6-7 Big Ten record: 3-5 (T-5th, West) Stadium: Memorial Stadium (60,670)

RANKING 66

FIGHTING ILLINI at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Champaign, Ill.
COACH: Tim Beckman — At Illinois: 12-25, 3 years; overall: 33-41, 6 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Bill Cubit
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tim Banks

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2001
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 7 offense, 7 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Wes Lunt, RB Josh Ferguson, WR Geronimo Allison, DE Jihad Ward, LB Mason Monheim, CB V'Angelo Bentley

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Lunt can make all the throws, and a diverse passing game will bear fruit if he stays upright. Allison has standout potential on the outside. The Ward-led defense has toughness up front and an improving pass rush. In the secondary, the Illini have experience and decent depth.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The running game hasn't been nearly productive enough and Cubit isn't always patient enough with it. Will the pass protection hold up for an immobile quarterback? Open-field tackling has been an ongoing mess. Increased turnover production is desperately needed.

WES LUNT
Photo by Steve Beyer

OFFENSE

Junior Wes Lunt has serious arm talent and was heroic during repeated fourth-quarter comebacks early in 2014, but Big Ten play was an entirely different animal. Lunt's lack of feel for the pass rush hurt his performance badly.

Let's acknowledge: Illinois' offensive line play has been spotty for a while now. And it will be spotty again in 2015. Veterans Teddy Karras, Austin Schmidt, Joe Spencer and the rest are mostly just — what's that word? — guys.

But Lunt has to rise above it. Coordinator Bill Cubit wants him to make quicker decisions and get that ball out. The passing attack, which ranked second in the Big Ten last season at 249.8 yards per game, has to set up the run for this team.

The Illini lost slot man Mikey Dudek — the team's best player last year — to an ACL injury that will cost him at least a good chunk of the season, but outside receiver Geronimo Allison is a deep threat.

The running game is a question mark. Josh Ferguson's open-field moves scream NFL third-down back, but does he have the hit-the-hole discipline to realize his potential as a mainstay in the backfield? He'll be pushed by junior college transfer Henry Enyenehi, a more natural pounder, and freshmen Dre Brown and Ke'Shawn Vaughn.

DEFENSE

There's no sugarcoating it: The Illini obviously have to improve from last year's league-worst 456.4 yards and 34 points allowed per game.

There's encouraging size and quality on the line in monstrous senior end Jihad Ward and 305-pound junior tackles Teko Powell and Rob Bain. Junior Dawuane Smoot has shown flashes of true potential in the hybrid Leo spot.

Middle linebacker T.J. Neal is a bit undersized at 6-1, 235, but he has a thumper's mentality and should be much-improved as a junior. Mason Monheim is a hard-nosed, undersized, senior who got himself into the middle of some big plays during the victories Illinois needed to earn bowl eligibility in 2014.

"I'm proud of the way that we've established ourselves and gotten better each and every year."

— Tim Beckman

The secondary is as experienced at cornerback as any you'll find. Third-year starters Eaton Spence and V'Angelo Bentley are good enough to have held off challenges from a host of corners brought in by coach Tim Beckman, who specializes at the position.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Taylor Zalewski has been allowed a lengthy rope to prove himself as a reliable kicker. Illini fans are still on the edges of their seats even on extra points. A few contenders are in the running to replace punter Justin Duvernois. Bentley is the only player in school history to return a kickoff and a punt for a touchdown in the same season.

OVERVIEW

Beckman wants to tell anyone who'll listen about Illinois' progress during his first three seasons as coach. And you know what? The Illini have gone from two victories to four to a borderline-acceptable six. Technically, that's progress. But it'll be hard, even in a weak Big Ten West, to move the pile forward.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Ke'Shawn Vaughn: The running back from Nashville, Tenn., had more successful programs chasing him, but he chose Illinois — the capper of a surprisingly promising recruiting class for the Illini. Vaughn will have an opportunity to bust through the crowd and make an instant impact.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	12	**Wes Lunt***	6-5	225	Jr.
RB	6	**Josh Ferguson***	5-10	195	Sr.
WR	8	**Geronimo Allison***	6-4	195	Sr.
WR	13	Dionte Taylor	6-0	190	Jr.
WR	19	**Justin Hardee***	6-1	195	Sr.
TE	87	Tyler White	6-5	255	Jr.
LT	57	Austin Schmidt	6-6	295	Jr.
LG	75	Patrick Flavin	6-7	300	Sr.
C	71	**Joe Spencer***	6-4	300	Jr.
RG	69	**Teddy Karras***	6-4	210	Sr.
RT	67	**Christian DiLauro***	6-5	295	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	17	**Jihad Ward***	6-6	295	Sr.
NT	96	**Rob Bain***	6-3	305	Jr.
DT	93	Teko Powell	6-3	305	Jr.
LEO	91	Dawuane Smoot	6-3	270	Jr.
LB	52	**T.J. Neal***	6-1	235	Jr.
LB	43	**Mason Monheim***	6-1	235	Sr.
STAR	14	Eric Finney	6-0	220	Sr.
CB	27	**Eaton Spence***	6-0	185	Sr.
CB	2	**V'Angelo Bentley***	5-10	190	Sr.
SS	3	**Taylor Barton***	6-1	215	Jr.
FS	20	Clayon Fejedelem	6-1	195	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	17	**Taylor Zalewski***	6-3	220	Sr.
P	13	Ryan Frain	6-2	220	Jr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	KENT STATE
Sept. 12	WESTERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 19	at North Carolina
Sept. 26	MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Oct. 3	NEBRASKA
Oct. 10	at Iowa
Oct. 24	WISCONSIN
Oct. 31	at Penn State
Nov. 7	at Purdue
Nov. 14	OHIO STATE
Nov. 21	at Minnesota
Nov. 28	vs. Northwestern (Chicago, IL)

2014 RESULTS

W	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	28-17
W	WESTERN KENTUCKY	42-34
L	at Washington	19-44
W	TEXAS STATE	42-35
L	at Nebraska	14-45
L	PURDUE	27-38
L	at Wisconsin	28-38
W	MINNESOTA	28-24
L	at Ohio State	14-55
L	IOWA	14-30
W	PENN STATE	16-14
W	at Northwestern	47-33
	Heart of Dallas Bowl	
L	vs. Louisiana Tech	18-35

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	25.9	84
Rushing	117.5	111
Passing	249.8	48
Total	367.2	94
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	34.0	107
Rushing	239.2	115
Passing	217.2	47
Total	456.4	109
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 3	- 0.23	81

NORTHWESTERN | WILDCATS

Big Ten rank: 12 Record: 5-7 Big Ten record: 3-5 (T-5th, West) Stadium: Ryan Field (47,130)

RANKING 69

WILDCATS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Evanston, Ill.
COACH: Pat Fitzgerald — At Northwestern and overall: 60-53, 9 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mick McCall
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Hankwitz

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2000
LAST BOWL: 2012, Gator
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 6 offense, 8 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Justin Jackson, WR Christian Jones, SB Dan Vitale, LT Matt Frazier, DE Dean Lowry, CB Matthew Harris, S Godwin Igwebuike

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Northwestern has the ability to create explosive plays on offense, and a ball-hawking group of defenders can create timely turnovers. Jackson is a rising star running back with All-Big Ten potential.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Northwestern returns an unproven offensive line that has hamstrung the offense over the last two seasons. The Wildcats have struggled to tackle in the fourth quarter, allowing backbreaking conversions on third and fourth downs late in games. A consistent punter must emerge.

JUSTIN JACKSON
Photo by Tomasso DeRosa

OFFENSE

Whoever wins Northwestern's quarterback battle — Zack Oliver, Matt Alviti or Clayton Thorson — will enjoy the benefit of an experienced and talented group of skill position players.

Alviti and Thorson are dual-threat quarterbacks, while the big-armed Oliver promises a bit of a threat on the ground, too. But given that Oliver can't run the ball like the other two, it's possible the Wildcats couple employ a two-quarterback system.

Sophomore Justin Jackson returns after rushing for 1,187 yards and 10 touchdowns in a true freshman campaign that earned him All-Big Ten honorable mention honors.

Receiver Christian Jones, who has the most reliable hands on the team, returns after taking a medical redshirt last season.

Speedy receiver Miles Shuler will be a great asset in the screen and run games. Superback Dan Vitale has big-game potential and tends to shine on the biggest stages. He's an athletic freak who needs to be featured more.

Unfortunately for the Wildcats, the game isn't played with only skill guys. The Wildcats' offensive line has struggled in the last few years. Northwestern allowed 34 sacks last season and will look to retool its offensive line in order to gain more consistency from the group.

DEFENSE

Northwestern will enjoy depth on its defensive lines with seven upperclassmen who have seen significant experience, plus sophomore Xavier Washington, who was in the defensive end rotation as a true freshman.

Talented defensive ends Deonte Gibson and Dean Lowry are back; Greg Kuhar and Sean McEvilly are expected to man the middle of the line. The wild card is Ifeadi Odenigbo, a talented rush end/outside linebacker who has struggled in the run game. His inability to defend the run has left him off the field, for the most part, on early downs.

Junior cornerback Matthew Harris and safety Godwin Igwebuike will push for All-Big Ten honors.

> "We trust the coaching; we trust everything around us. We just have to be more consistent."
>
> — CB Matthew Harris

The question rests with an inexperienced group of linebackers. Sophomore Anthony Walker ended last season, his redshirt freshman year, as the starter in place of Collin Ellis, who was forced to retire due to injury. Walker proved to have big-game potential, but he has yet to start an entire college season.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Northwestern ranked last in the Big Ten in punting last season, which proved to hamstring the defense a number of times. Kicker Jack Mitchell returns after missing only one field goal attempt inside the 40. He needs to increase his range — he was 50 percent from over 40 yards last season.

Punt returner Miles Shuler has explosiveness that could be a tremendous asset.

OVERVIEW

After back-to-back losing seasons, this year is extremely important for Northwestern and its coaching staff, which remains intact from its 10-3 season in 2012. Injuries have plagued Northwestern during the past two seasons, limiting what the coaches can do in practice. Staying healthy will be as big a key as any.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Clayton Thorson: After redshirting last season, Thorson could see playing time, even if he doesn't win the starting job. At 6-4, he has great running ability and is capable of directing the option, a Northwestern staple.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	10	Zack Oliver	6-4	240	Sr.
RB	21	Justin Jackson	5-11	185	So.
WR	**19**	**Cameron Dickerson***	**6-3**	**210**	**Sr.**
WR	14	Christian Jones	6-3	230	Sr.
WR	**5**	**Miles Shuler***	**5-10**	**180**	**Sr.**
SB	**40**	**Dan Vitale***	**6-2**	**235**	**Sr.**
LT	**53**	**Geoff Mogus***	**6-5**	**305**	**Sr.**
LG	73	Adam DePietro	6-5	295	Jr.
C	63	Ian Park	6-4	290	Jr.
RG	**57**	**Matt Frazier***	**6-4**	**295**	**Sr.**
RT	**76**	**Eric Olson***	**6-6**	**285**	**Jr.**

DEFENSE

DE	**13**	**Deonte Gibson***	**6-3**	**270**	**Sr.**
DT	**93**	**Greg Kuhar***	**6-3**	**310**	**Jr.**
DT	91	Sean McEvilly	6-5	300	Sr.
DE	**94**	**Dean Lowry***	**6-6**	**280**	**Sr.**
LB	51	Jaylen Prater	6-0	235	Jr.
LB	**18**	**Anthony Walker***	**6-1**	**225**	**So.**
LB	**55**	**Drew Smith***	**6-1**	**220**	**Sr.**
CB	**27**	**Matthew Harris***	**5-11**	**180**	**Jr.**
CB	**23**	**Nick VanHoose***	**6-0**	**190**	**Sr.**
S	**2**	**Traveon Henry***	**6-1**	**220**	**Sr.**
S	16	Godwin Igwebuike	6-0	200	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**8**	**Jack Mitchell***	**6-3**	**210**	**Jr.**
P	32	Hunter Niswander	6-5	230	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	STANFORD
Sept. 12	EASTERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 19	at Duke
Sept. 26	BALL STATE
Oct. 3	MINNESOTA
Oct. 10	at Michigan
Oct. 17	IOWA
Oct. 24	at Nebraska
Nov. 7	PENN STATE
Nov. 14	PURDUE
Nov. 21	at Wisconsin
Nov. 28	vs. Illinois (Chicago, IL)

2014 RESULTS

L	CALIFORNIA	24-31
L	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	15-23
W	WESTERN ILLINOIS	24-7
W	at Penn State	29-6
W	WISCONSIN	20-14
L	at Minnesota	17-24
L	NEBRASKA	17-38
L	at Iowa	7-48
L	MICHIGAN	9-10
W	at Notre Dame (OT)	43-40
W	at Purdue	38-14
L	ILLINOIS	33-47

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	23.0	98
Rushing	136.6	100
Passing	216.5	76
Total	353.1	104
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.2	47
Rushing	169.9	70
Passing	214.3	42
Total	384.3	53
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 4	+0.33	T-40

INDIANA | HOOSIERS

Big Ten rank: 13 Record: 4-8 Big Ten record: 1-7 (7th, East) Stadium: Memorial Stadium (52,929)

RANKING 70

HOOSIERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Bloomington, Ind.
COACH: Kevin Wilson — At Indiana and overall: 14-34, 4 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kevin Johns
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brian Knorr

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1967, co-champions
LAST BOWL: 2007, Insight
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 6 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Nate Sudfeld, RB Jordan Howard, LT Jason Spriggs, RG Dan Feeney, DT Darius Latham, DL Nick Mangieri, LB Tegray Scales, FS Antonio Allen

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: IU has talent and experience on the offensive and defensive lines. The return of Sudfeld from injury is a big boost. Howard should keep the ground game going.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Depth at QB could be an issue, so IU can't afford to lose Sudfeld again. The receiving corps needs to step up after a down year. Defense, which has been a weakness at IU for many years, needs to continue the improvement it began last season, although it was still one of the worst nationally.

OFFENSE

Indiana was dealt a double whammy in the sixth game of last season, when starting quarterback Nate Sudfeld suffered a season-ending injury to his non-throwing shoulder, and backup Chris Covington was lost for the year with a knee injury.

Zander Diamont had to take over as an undersized true freshman, and the passing game, naturally, suffered.

While there is still concern about quarterback depth, a healthy Sudfeld — who has thrown for 4,306 career yards and 34 touchdowns — will be in charge of what should be a potent offense.

Although running back Tevin Coleman left for the NFL after rushing for more than 2,000 yards as a junior, Indiana has a good answer: Jordan Howard. The UAB transfer rushed for 2,468 yards in the past two seasons, including 1,587 last year.

The interior line should be among the best in the Big Ten. It is led by two of the best in the conference in senior left tackle Jason Spriggs, a four-year starter, and junior right guard Dan Feeney. Four proven tight ends should make the line even better.

The questions are at wide receiver, where sophomore J-Shun Harris is the leading returner, with just 18 catches for 168 yards, and one of two returners who caught a touchdown last season. The Hoosiers had just seven passing touchdowns in 2014.

DEFENSE

Four key players return to the three-man front — Nick Mangieri, Darius Latham and the duo of Adarius Rayner and Nate Hoff, who split time at nose tackle last year. Latham, in particular, is a freakish athlete.

Zack Shaw is the only senior in a talented linebacker corps. Junior T.J. Simmons, a two-year starter, finished second on the team with 72 tackles last year. Sophomore Tegray Scales will look to build off a Freshman All-American campaign.

Redshirt sophomore linebacker Marcus Oliver, coming off an impact freshman year in 2013, suffered a season-ending knee injury in the third game of last season.

The secondary, which lost three starters, will look to junior free safety Antonio Allen — a fierce hitter and IU's leading returning tackler (74). The concern is at cornerback. Undersized redshirt sophomores Rashard Fant, rated as high as No. 14 at the position nationally in high school, and Noel Padmore figure to be the starters.

ANTONIO ALLEN
Photo by Joe Robbins

"This team has been the most enjoyable to coach, had the most energy, and been the most passionate."
— Coach Kevin Wilson, in the spring

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Griffin Oakes and punter Erich Toth return. Oakes took over early last season and converted 13 of 18 field goal attempts in 10 games. His 58-yarder against Maryland was the longest in the nation and set an IU record.

Toth, while solid at pinning opponents deep in their own territory, will look to improve upon last season's 40.7-yard average.

OVERVIEW

A healthy Sudfeld and the addition of Howard, along with one of the better lines in the Big Ten, should provide the offense with a solid nucleus. Making headway in the Big Ten East isn't easy, and much will depend on the defense to be competitive following a last-place finish in 2014.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Jordan Howard: With Tevin Coleman's departure, Howard couldn't have picked a better time to become a Hoosier. The junior is a proven commodity who transferred after UAB dropped its football program after last season.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	7	**Nate Sudfeld***	6-5	240	Sr.
RB	8	Jordan Howard	6-1	225	Jr.
WR	5	**J-Shun Harris***	5-8	170	So.
WR	10	Simmie Cobbs	6-4	215	So.
WR	4	Ricky Jones	5-10	185	Jr.
TE	88	**Anthony Corsaro***	6-3	250	Sr.
LT	78	**Jason Spriggs***	6-7	305	Sr.
LG	77	Dimitric Camiel	6-7	319	Jr.
C	50	Jake Reed	6-4	288	Sr.
RG	67	**Dan Feeney***	6-4	305	Jr.
RT	62	**Ralston Evans***	6-4	290	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	56	**Nick Mangieri***	6-5	270	Sr.
NT	99	**Adarius Rayner***	6-2	300	Sr.
DT	98	**Darius Latham***	6-5	305	Jr.
LB	33	Zack Shaw	6-3	252	Sr.
LB	2	**T.J. Simmons***	6-0	233	Jr.
LB	8	Tegray Scales	6-0	220	So.
LB	41	Clyde Newton	6-1	230	Jr.
CB	16	Rashard Fant	5-10	175	So.
CB	12	Noel Padmore	5-11	180	So.
SS	30	Chase Dutra	6-1	205	So.
FS	40	**Antonio Allen***	5-10	205	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	92	**Griffin Oakes***	5-10	197	So.
P	36	**Erich Toth***	6-3	208	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	SOUTHERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 12	FIU
Sept. 19	WESTERN KENTUCKY
Sept. 26	at Wake Forest
Oct. 3	OHIO STATE
Oct. 10	at Penn State
Oct. 17	RUTGERS
Oct. 24	at Michigan State
Nov. 7	IOWA
Nov. 14	MICHIGAN
Nov. 21	at Maryland
Nov. 28	at Purdue

2014 RESULTS

W	INDIANA STATE	28-10
L	at Bowling Green	42-45
W	at Missouri	31-27
L	MARYLAND	15-37
W	NORTH TEXAS	49-24
L	at Iowa	29-45
L	MICHIGAN STATE	17-56
L	at Michigan	10-34
L	PENN STATE	7-13
L	at Rutgers	23-45
L	at Ohio State	27-42
W	PURDUE	23-16

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	25.1	87
Rushing	263.6	9
Passing	141.4	120
Total	405.0	61
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	32.8	T-100
Rushing	182.7	T-81
Passing	251.1	94
Total	433.8	93
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
-2	-0.17	T-76

PURDUE | BOILERMAKERS

Big Ten rank: 14 Record: 3-9 Big Ten record: 1-7 (7th, West) Stadium: Ross-Ade Stadium (57,236)

RANKING 79

BOILERMAKERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: West Lafayette, Ind.
COACH: Darrell Hazell — At Purdue: 4-20, 2 years; overall: 20-30, 4 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: John Shoop
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Greg Hudson

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2000, co-champions
LAST BOWL: 2012, Heart of Dallas
RETURNING STARTERS: 17, 8 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Austin Appleby, RB D.J. Knox, WR Danny Anthrop, C Robert Kugler, MLB Ja'Whaun Bentley, DT Jake Replogle, CB Frankie Williams

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Led by the quickness of Anthrop and Knox and a solid line anchored by Kugler, the offense should be much better than it was in 2014. Bentley, Replogle and Williams will be three of the best defenders in the Big Ten West. Paul Griggs made 80 percent of his field goal tries in 2014.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: If Appleby doesn't regain the form that produced 107 points in his first three starts, Purdue could be looking at making a quarterback change in September. Other than Anthrop, there is no proven go-to receiver. While Knox, Green and Jones appear to be talented running backs, Green is the only one to have carried the ball in a college game.

JA'WHAUN BENTLEY
Photo by Steve Beyer

OFFENSE

Purdue has a good chance of being more productive than in 2014, when it scored only 60 points in the season's final four games.

The Boilermakers have set the bar low, but they still need some things to break their way to clear it. Big-play wide receiver Danny Anthrop has to return at 100 percent from knee surgery, and young running backs D.J. Knox, Keyante Green and Markell Jones must develop as coach Darrell Hazell anticipates.

Junior Austin Appleby, meanwhile, returns as the starting quarterback and could flourish in a new passing offense that is designed to involve vertical throws much more frequently. If Appleby stumbles, fellow junior Danny Etling or freshmen David Blough and Elijah Sindelar could create a change under center.

The line is the strength of the offense, led by center Robert Kugler and left tackle David Hedelin. All five starters return and have the skill to give Appleby time to throw.

DeAngelo Yancey and Cameron Posey will complement Anthrop at wide receiver, which Hazell hopes will be bolstered by the addition of junior college playmaker Anthony Mahoungou.

DEFENSE

Sophomore middle linebacker Ja'Whaun Bentley has a chance to be one of the Big Ten's elite defensive players after making 76 tackles and recovering three fumbles as a freshman. Bentley will anchor the defense.

Fellow linebackers Jimmy Herman and Danny Ezechukwu also are returning starters and will give Purdue one of the best linebacking trios in the Big Ten West.

Tackle Jake Replogle returns after making 40 tackles, including a team leading 10.5 for loss. Senior cornerbacks Frankie Williams and Anthony Brown will have to lead the secondary while first-year starting safeties Robert Gregory and Leroy Clark adjust.

> "We should have nine or 10 offensive linemen this year instead of six or seven. That is a huge difference."
> — Darrell Hazell

The other primary concern for the defense is at the end positions, where sophomore Gelen Robinson and junior Evan Panfil will replace Ryan Russell and Jalani Phillips.

The Boilermakers, who allowed 30 points or more in eight of their 12 games in 2014, will need solid play from their ends and safeties if they are to give an evolving offense a chance to win.

SPECIAL TEAMS

This could be a strength for Purdue, as senior kicker Paul Griggs made 16 of 20 field goal attempts last season. Senior punter Thomas Meadows is back after averaging 39.8 yards per attempt. Williams will handle punt returns once more, and Anthrop resumes his role as kick returner.

OVERVIEW

The Boilermakers should be better on both sides, but getting to .500 and playing in a bowl game for the first time since 2012 will be difficult for a team that still is very young, especially at the skill positions. If Appleby struggles, it could be another long season at Purdue, which has only one Big Ten win in Hazell's first two seasons.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Markell Jones: Indiana's Mr. Football rushed for 3,536 yards and 60 touchdowns in 2014 as a senior at Columbus East High School and is expected to provide a nice blend of speed and power. He should challenge D.J. Knox and Keyante Green for a starting position.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	12	**Austin Appleby***	6-5	229	Jr.
RB	27	D.J. Knox	5-7	197	So.
RB.	23	Keyante Green	5-9	219	So.
WR	33	**Danny Anthrop***	6-0	191	Sr.
WR	7	**DeAngelo Yancey***	6-2	223	Jr.
WR	18	Cameron Posey	6-1	183	Jr.
LT	75	**David Hedelin***	6-4	298	Sr.
LG	72	**Jason King***	6-4	305	Jr.
C	57	**Robert Kugler***	6-3	294	Sr.
RG	70	**Jordan Roos***	6-4	312	Jr.
RT	73	**J.J. Prince***	6-6	297	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	13	Gelen Robinson	6-1	250	So.
DT	54	**Jake Replogle***	6-5	275	Jr.
NT	14	**Ra'Zahn Howard***	6-3	310	Jr.
DE	95	Evan Panfil	6-5	262	Jr.
LB	29	**Jimmy Herman***	6-4	230	Jr.
LB	4	**Ja'Whaun Bentley***	6-2	260	So.
LB	36	**Danny Ezechukwu***	6-2	246	So.
CB	24	**Frankie Williams***	5-9	190	Sr.
CB	9	**Anthony Brown***	5-11	190	Sr.
SS	7	Robert Gregory	6-1	219	Jr.
FS	3	Leroy Clark	5-10	190	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	37	**Paul Griggs***	6-1	196	Sr.
P	30	**Thomas Meadows***	6-0	182	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 6	at Marshall
Sept. 12	INDIANA STATE
Sept. 19	VIRGINIA TECH
Sept. 26	BOWLING GREEN
Oct. 3	at Michigan State
Oct. 10	MINNESOTA
Oct. 17	at Wisconsin
Oct. 31	NEBRASKA
Nov. 7	ILLINOIS
Nov. 14	at Northwestern
Nov. 21	at Iowa
Nov. 28	INDIANA

2014 RESULTS

W	WESTERN MICHIGAN	43-34
L	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	17-38
L	vs. Notre Dame (Indianapolis)	14-30
W	SOUTHERN ILLINOIS	35-13
L	IOWA	10-24
W	at Illinois	38-27
L	MICHIGAN STATE	31-45
L	at Minnesota	38-39
L	at Nebraska	14-35
L	WISCONSIN	16-34
L	NORTHWESTERN	14-38
L	at Indiana	16-23

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	23.8	95
Rushing	157.2	71
Passing	187.4	101
Total	344.6	108
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	31.7	97
Rushing	192.1	91
Passing	223.9	55
Total	416.0	80
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 5	- 0.42	100

PICKING THE BIG 12

TCU, Baylor on Collision Course for Epic Rematch

With one game to go, the Big 12 Conference had the inside track into last year's inaugural College Football Playoff, and an unbelievable finish line — putting two teams into the four-team field — lay just beyond the final turn.

Instead, TCU and Baylor were run off the track by Ohio State and put into the wall by Florida State, and the Big 12's championship hopes were towed away, smoldering, into lesser bowls.

Now, both the Horned Frogs and Bears are back in this year's race.

Give TCU the edge for now because the Frogs return uber-dynamic quarterback Trevone Boykin, all four starters at receiver and four starters on the offensive line.

That's only a smidge better than Baylor, which returns almost everybody of note ... well, except for quarterback Bryce Petty.

Then again, Baylor won last year's head-to-head meeting, a 61-58 fabulous finish in Waco. On other hand, TCU dominated all but the last 11 minutes of that contest.

Boykin's huge improvement last year produced numerous national awards and All-American accolades, and a glossary of school records, including 33 touchdowns and 354 yards per game (fourth nationally).

TCU finished 12-1 and co-champs of the Big 12 — just the kind of turnaround (from 4-8 in 2013) that Gary Patterson's program had sought since joining the league after a 16-year sojourn through the WAC, Conference USA, Mountain West and even the Big East.

Baylor was the other co-champ (though the Big 12 has amended its rulebook again, this time to award a head-to-head tiebreaker), finishing 11-2 overall due to Petty's strong arm and fleet receivers. Backup Seth Russell gets the first shot at replacing Petty, though he's already being pushed by true freshman Jarrett Stidham.

It's defense where the Bears will win this year. The Baylor defense returns nine starters, including wrecking ball Shawn Oakman and the entire front four.

Oklahoma State went from left-for-dead — five consecutive moribund defeats, speeding toward a losing season and a 14-point deficit in the finale at rival Oklahoma — to a lightning strike punt return touchdown and an overtime win over the Sooners. That brought new life and put the Cowboys in a bowl. They finished 7-6, and Mike Gundy and billionaire booster Boone Pickens were chums again.

Mason Rudolph came out of his redshirt in the 11th game and virtually saved the season. Now, blessed with talented young receivers and a fortified offensive line, he'll be one of the Big 12's top quarterbacks.

The Sooners are reeling after an 8-5 flop — not bad by some standards, but well below Bob Stoops' own. OU was favored to win the league last year, but lost three times at home (there were only three home losses from 1999 to 2010) and were embarrassed, 40-6, by Clemson in the bowl.

CONFERENCE PICKS

	Good news	Bad news	Our call
1. TCU	QB Trevone Boykin was fantastic in 2014 and should be better in 2015.	RB B.J. Catalon and CB Chris Hackett left early but went undrafted.	The defense will be fine, and the offense makes TCU a national contender.
2. Baylor	The Bears' defense is stacked with nine returning starters.	QB Bryce Petty takes his passing records and two Big 12 titles to the NFL.	It's a new day in Waco, a new confidence from winning back-to-back titles.
3. Oklahoma St.	Mason Rudolph is OSU's best QB since Brandon Weeden.	An improved O-line might still be a year away from being good enough.	Seven returning starters on defense allow the Cowboys to contend.
4. Oklahoma	RB Samaje Perine and WR Sterling Shepard are back and healthy.	Mike Stoops' defense lost five starters; the O-line lost 105 career starts.	Texas Tech transfer Baker Mayfield wins the QB job, but not a lot of games.
5. Texas	Charlie Strong seems to be instilling toughness and discipline.	Bad News: Tyrone Swoopes needs to get much better to be a Big 12 QB.	RB Johnathan Gray and an OK O-line aren't enough to win big.
6. Kansas State	Defense — loaded up front and in the secondary — never rests in Manhattan.	So much star power — Waters, Lockett, Sexton — graduated.	K-State will struggle to score, and in this league, defense isn't enough.
7. West Virginia	Skyler Howard separated himself from other QBs during spring practice.	Stud WR tandem Kevin White and Mario Alford must be replaced.	Too many holes on offense will be a setback to an experienced defense.
8. Texas Tech	Athletic Patrick Mahomes looks like the Red Raiders' QB of the future.	Defense was all-time bad last season (122nd) and isn't discernibly better.	Mahomes and WR Jakeem Grant make offense fun, but oh, that defense.
9. Iowa State	WR Quenton Bundrage is back after missing 2014 with a knee injury.	The Cyclones ranked dead last, 125th, in FBS total defense last season.	Winless in Big 12 play in 2014, Paul Rhoads needs a turnaround in '15.
10. Kansas	David Beaty replaces Charlie Weis and adds new energy to the program.	Weis replaced Turner Gill, added new energy to the program and went 6-22.	KU fans will be curious, but Beaty's first year will yield forgettable results.

Lindy's 2015
ALL-BIG 12 TEAM

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Trevone Boykin	Sr.	TCU
RB	Samaje Perine	So.	Oklahoma
RB	Shock Linwood	Jr.	Baylor
WR	Corey Coleman	Jr.	Baylor
WR	Josh Doctson	Sr.	TCU
WR	Sterling Shepard	Sr.	Oklahoma
C	Joey Hunt	Sr.	TCU
OL	Spencer Drango	Sr.	Baylor
OL	Le'Raven Clark	Sr.	Texas Tech
OL	Cody Whitehair	Sr.	Kansas State
OL	Halapoulivaati Vaitai	Sr.	TCU
AP	Jakeem Grant	Sr.	Texas Tech
K	Josh Lambert	Jr.	West Virginia

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	Shawn Oakman	Sr.	Baylor
DL	Emmanuel Ogbah	Jr.	Oklahoma State
DL	Andrew Billings	Jr.	Baylor
DL	Pete Robertson	Sr.	Texas Tech
LB	Eric Striker	Sr.	Oklahoma
LB	Ryan Simmons	Sr.	Oklahoma State
LB	Dominique Alexander	Jr.	Oklahoma
DB	Karl Joseph	Sr.	West Virginia
DB	Kevin Peterson	Sr.	Oklahoma State
DB	Zack Sanchez	Jr.	Oklahoma
DB	Dante Barnett	Jr.	Kansas State
P	Nick O'Toole	Jr.	West Virginia

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Mason Rudolph	So.	Oklahoma State
RB	DeAndre Washington	Sr.	Texas Tech
RB	Aaron Green	Sr.	TCU
FB	Glenn Gronkowski	Jr.	Kansas State
WR	KD Cannon	So.	Baylor
C	Kyle Fuller	Jr.	Baylor
OL	Brady Foltz	Sr.	TCU
OL	Blake Muir	Sr.	Baylor
OL	Nila Kasitati	Sr.	Oklahoma
OL	Adam Pankey	Jr.	West Virginia
AP	Todd Mays	Jr.	Oklahoma State
K	Jaden Oberkrom	Sr.	TCU

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Davion Pierson	Sr.	TCU
DL	Charles Tapper	Sr.	Oklahoma
DL	K.J. Smith	So.	Baylor
DL	Jimmy Bean	Sr.	Oklahoma State
LB	Nick Kwiatkoski	Jr.	West Virginia
LB	Seth Jacobs	Jr.	Oklahoma State
LB	Taylor Young	So.	Baylor
DB	Jordan Sterns	Jr.	Oklahoma State
DB	Danzel McDaniel	Sr.	Kansas State
DB	Sam E. Richardson	Sr.	Iowa State
DB	Terrell Burt	Sr.	Baylor
P	Taylor Symmank	Sr.	Texas Tech

Stoops again made wholesale changes to his staff (East Carolina's Lincoln Riley replaces Josh Heupel as offensive coordinator) and hopes an up-tempo spread attack will still maximize bowling-ball runner Samaje Perine.

Texas is still in a rebuilding mode in Year 2 under Charlie Strong. The Longhorns, 6-7 last year, have issues across the board, starting at quarterback.

Tyrone Swoopes probably will beat out Jerrod Heard, but Swoopes threw just six touchdown passes and eight interceptions against ranked teams and finished last among Big 12 quarterbacks in total offense, passing yards and pass efficiency. The Horns hope that their defense can remain rigid; UT ranked second in the league in total defense and first against the pass last season.

Kansas State went 9-4 last year and had a shot to win every game, but the Wildcats are under reconstruction. Gone is dual-threat wizard Jake Waters, and the quarterback competition to replace him was also raging at the end of the spring. Also, big-play receivers Tyler Lockett and Curry Sexton have moved on. The offensive line returns four starters, and the defense is stacked.

West Virginia lost four of its last five and finished 7-6 last season. The Mountaineers should be more defensive in 2015 — eight starters are back, including linebacker Nick Kwiatkoski and safety Karl Joseph, always on the lookout for a highlight hit.

Another year in the Kliff Kingsbury system might mean another step forward for Texas Tech. The Red Raiders went 4-8, losing eight of their last 10, but true freshman Patrick Mahomes broke out with 1,304 passing yards with 14 touchdowns and just two interceptions in the final three games.

After a 2-10 season — winless in the Big 12 — Iowa State hangs its hat on a stellar offensive line, an improving defense and Sam B. Richardson, whose 21 career starts makes him the Big 12's most experienced quarterback.

Kansas fired Charlie Weis and hired Texas A&M assistant David Beaty, who promises more discipline, more fun and more plays.

— John E. Hoover

Most Valuable Player

Trevone Boykin, QB, TCU

Offensive Player of the Year

Samaje Perine, RB, Oklahoma

Defensive Player of the Year

Shawn Oakman, DE, Baylor

Newcomer of the Year

Todd Mays, RB, Oklahoma State

HONOR ROLL

Most accurate passer	Trevone Boykin	TCU
Strongest arm	Montell Cozart	Kansas
Best scrambler	Trevone Boykin	TCU
Coolest in the clutch	Mason Rudolph	Oklahoma State
Toughest to bring down	Samaje Perine	Oklahoma
Best hands	Sterling Shepard	Oklahoma
Most dangerous deep threat	KD Cannon	Baylor
Best pass blocker	Le'Raven Clark	Texas Tech
Best run blocker	Spencer Drango	Baylor
Best cover corner	Kevin Peterson	Oklahoma State
Best pass rusher	Eric Striker	Oklahoma
Special teams demon	Jakeem Grant	Texas Tech

THE **BIG ONES**

September 3	
TCU at Minnesota	Early road test for Big 12 elite against solid Gophers.
September 4	
Baylor at SMU	Chad Morris is trying to re-energize the Mustangs.
September 5	
Texas at Notre Dame	Classic matchup that may be a letdown in quality.
September 12	
Oklahoma at Tennessee	Sooners' season could swing here vs. improved Vols.
September 19	
Texas Tech at Arkansas	Hold on tight: Hogs ran for 438 in Lubbock last year.
Cal at Texas	Bears still getting better under Sonny Dykes.
SMU at TCU	Crosstown rivalry still meaningful in the Metroplex.
Tulsa at Oklahoma	TU trying to compete under Philip Montgomery.
September 26	
Maryland at West Virginia	Terps rallied big, but lost 2014 meeting, 40-37.
Kansas at Rutgers	We see what David Beaty's team looks like here.
Oklahoma State at Texas	Horns laid a 28-7 beatdown in Stillwater last year.
October 3	
Texas at TCU	Frogs shared Big 12 title after 48-10 thrashing of UT.
October 10	
Oklahoma vs. Texas (Dallas)	Red River Rivalry is down, but still important.
Oklahoma State at West Virginia	If Cowboys hope to compete, this one is huge.
TCU at Kansas State	Purple Haze between Patterson, Snyder always fun.
October 17	
Oklahoma at Kansas State	By this time, KSU usually improves — does OU?
November 5	
Baylor at Kansas State	Wildcats three toughest opponents all in Manhattan.
November 7	
TCU at Oklahoma State	42-9 loss to Frogs last year started a five-game skid.
November 14	
Oklahoma at Baylor	Bears have beaten OU three of last four meetings.
November 21	
TCU at Oklahoma	Can Sooners slow down Trevone Boykin this time?
Baylor at Oklahoma State	If Cowboys can block BU's front four, they have a shot.
November 27	
Baylor at TCU	Does de facto title game knock someone out of the CFP?
November 28	
Kansas State at Kansas	It's the Sunflower Showdown. It's a rivalry.
Oklahoma at Oklahoma State	Bedlam has become an annual instant classic.
December 5	
Texas at Baylor	If UT wants respectability, maybe a good place to start.

AARON GREEN

Photo by Jeff Goldberg

BOWL CONNECTIONS

BIG 12 CHAMP
College football playoff or Sugar Bowl

Sugar vs. SEC

Alamo vs. Pac-12

Russell Athletic vs. ACC

Texas vs. SEC

Liberty vs. SEC

Cactus vs. Pac-12

TOP 10 NFL TALENT

1. Shawn Oakman	DE	Sr.	Baylor	Massive body, tremendous speed, assassin attitude.
2. Emmanuel Ogbah	DE	Jr.	Oklahoma State	Long frame, explosive pass rusher, strong upper body.
3. Le'Raven Clark	OT	Sr.	Texas Tech	Exceptional pass protector who's emerging as a run blocker.
4. Spencer Drango	OL	Sr.	Baylor	Experienced and talented technician with great power.
5. Josh Doctson	WR	Sr.	TCU	Long striding, big-play specialist who high-points well.
6. Kevin Peterson	CB	Sr.	Oklahoma State	Fearless tackler who covers like shrink-wrap.
7. Zack Sanchez	CB	Jr.	Oklahoma	Highly skilled ball hawk who plays with an edge.
8. Sterling Shepard	WR	Sr.	Oklahoma	Great hands, agility, speed, balance and pedigree.
9. Glenn Gronkowski	FB	Jr.	Kansas State	Less impactful but more versatile than his famous brother.
10. Josh Lambert	PK	Jr.	West Virginia	Ridiculous accuracy belies his uncanny power.

*Only draft-eligible players included.

By Brian Perroni 247Sports

BIG 12 RECRUITING

TEXAS: Texas rebounded from a somewhat slow start to finish with a national Top 10 class. Landing in-state five-star LB Malik Jefferson was huge, but the Longhorns really made an impact in Florida, signing four players from the Sunshine State. Three in-state defensive backs – Holton Hill, Kris Boyd and Deshon Elliott – all have a chance to play early, as does Jefferson, who went through spring ball in Austin. The Longhorns also addressed a big need for offensive linemen, signing six of them.

OKLAHOMA: The Sooners went all over for this class, signing players from eight different states, as well as one from Canada. DT Neville Gallimore was the first-ever Canadian Army All-American and is an incredibly intriguing prospect. Bob Stoops and Co. went after some sleepers late in the process and a few, such as CB Antoine Stephens and WR Dahu Green, could see early playing time. Speedy junior college WR transfer Dede Westbrook went through spring ball and can be a game-changer.

TEXAS TECH: The Red Raiders signed a relatively small class, with only 20 signees, but a quarter of those were four-star prospects. Hawaiian DT Breiden Fehoko enrolled early and went through spring ball. Wide receiver JF Thomas flipped from TCU and was a big steal late, and Texas Tech held off numerous other schools for RB Corey Dauphine, one of the fastest track stars in the country. The one thing missing from the class is a QB, a position of need for sure.

WEST VIRGINIA: The Mountaineers did not hit the state of Florida as hard as usual but did land two four-stars from there in WR Jovon Durante and CB Tyrek Cole. Quarterback signee David Sills made national headlines years ago when he committed to USC as a seventh grader. He eventually switched to West Virginia and went through spring ball in Morgantown. Junior college CB Rasul Douglas comes in at a need position and has the skills necessary to make an impact in the Big 12.

BAYLOR: Stealing highly-ranked QB Jarrett Stidham and having him enroll early was a huge coup for the Bears. Other than that, the class does not have a lot of star power, but it has players that simply get it done on the field. Blake Lynch, J.W. Ketchum III and Tony Nicholson were all high school QBs that can play numerous positions. CB Jordan Tolbert and RB Jamycal Hasty are coming off injuries, but should be steals if they heal completely.

OKLAHOMA STATE: The Cowboys needed to reload quickly so they went heavy on the junior college transfers, signing eight of them. Safety Jordan Burton went through spring ball and will likely start early. Oklahoma State kept four-star QB John Kolar in state and grabbed one of Texas' top defensive linemen in tackle Darrion Daniels. One-time Texas ATH commit Louis Brown hails from a tiny school but could turn into a pass-rushing monster. JUCO RB Chris Carson will likely be counted on early.

TCU: Though TCU has been competing for top prospects lately, 2015 was an anomaly and the Frogs only signed a single four-star prospect. CB Deshawn Raymond from Louisiana is a good one, though, and he enrolled early. OT Sam Awolope and DE Tipa Galeai are both a bit raw, but both have very high ceilings. Flipping DT Jozie Milton from South Carolina was big, especially after TCU lost Cody Ford to Oklahoma. Watch out for DB Niko Small, who was an All-American in high school.

KANSAS STATE: Kansas State went completely away from its usual methods, signing only one junior college transfer in the class. That bodes well for the future as Bill Snyder and Co. will not have to continually reload every year. The Wildcats landed a pair of very good players from Georgia in LB Elijah Sullivan and CB Duke Shelley. In-state QB Alex Delton fits the offense to a T and he enrolled in time to go through spring ball. DT Bryce English is undersized but very good.

IOWA STATE: The Cyclones recruited a little bit of everywhere in 2015. Junior college players such as DT Demond Tucker, OT Jaypee Philbert and DT Bobby Leath will help restock the trenches next season. Iowa State also went into SEC country and landed Florida DT De'Amontae Jackson and Georgia LB Joshua Thomas. WR Denver Johnson has all the tools to be a high-caliber college player, as does LB Bobby McMillen. Keeping OTs Julian Good-Jones and Bryce Meeker in state was big.

KANSAS: New head coach David Beaty got off to a very late start, but he hit his familiar home state of Texas very hard and landed some quality under-the-radar players. JUCO RB Ke'aun Kinner excels as a runner and receiver and WR Chase Harrell possesses great size. Both players went through spring ball. In fact, eight members of the class enrolled early. QB Ryan Willis will need some time to adjust to the college game, but he was a big one to keep in state. DE Dorance Armstrong from Houston blew up late.

NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR: WR Dede Westbrook had a huge sophomore season at Blinn College, proving to be very elusive after the catch. The speedy junior college transfer enrolled at Oklahoma in January and made noise all throughout spring ball. He can line up in the slot or on the outside and he is tough to bring down. Already a polished route runner, he could be a nightmare for opposing defensive coordinators in 2015.

TOP SLEEPERS: Kansas had to start over almost from scratch after hiring David Beaty, but the Jayhawks found a number of under-the-radar players in Texas, where Beaty previously worked. WR Chase Harrell is a big target on the outside, while fellow WR Emmanuel Moore had an ultra-productive senior season.

LIKELY TO BE THE BEST NFL PLAYER: Baylor QB signee Jarrett Stidham has all the tools that NFL teams look for these days. He has ideal size already at 6-4, 195 and will play in an offense that has produced several pro quarterbacks already. He is also a surprisingly good runner, which keeps defenses honest. He seems destined to join what has become a line of Baylor QBs to be highly-drafted.

NO 1 SIGNING COUP: Texas was the only school to land a five-star in LB Malik Jefferson. He was a longtime lean to in-state rival Texas A&M, but the Longhorns landed him and he enrolled early in Austin in time to go through spring ball. His commitment and enrollment gave Charlie Strong a lot of momentum heading into Signing Day and helped spur a Top 10 finish.

BIGGEST MISS: Texas landed Jefferson, but missed out on a pair of other in-state five-stars in QB Kyler Murray and DT Daylon Mack. Both were longtime Texas A&M commits that visited the Longhorns late in the process — and there was a lot of smoke that they could both end up in Austin. In the end, they signed with the Aggies. Landing the pair would've given the Longhorns a Top 5 class.

BEST RECRUITING STAFF: Texas finished with a Top 10 overall class despite struggling on the field, so you have to give Charlie Strong and Co. credit for being able to land top talent. The Longhorns had three coaches finish among the top four in conference, with Brian Jean-Mary taking home No. 1 honors.

TOP 20 INCOMING RECRUITS

RK	NAME	HT/WT	POS	HOMETOWN/SCHOOL	COLLEGE
1.	Malik Jefferson	6-2/215	LB	Mesquite, Texas/Poteet	Texas
2.	Jarrett Stidham	6-4/195	QB	Stephenville, Texas	Baylor
3.	Breiden Fehoko	6-3/290	DT	Honolulu, Hawaii/Farrington	Texas Tech
4.	Anthony Wheeler	6-2/225	LB	Dallas, Texas/Skyline	Texas
5.	Chris Warren	6-2/240	RB	Rockwall, Texas	Texas
6.	Holton Hill	6-2/184	CB	Houston, Texas/Lamar	Texas
7.	Ricky DeBerry	6-2/240	LB	Mechanicsville, Va./Atlee	Oklahoma
8.	Kris Boyd	5-11/185	CB	Gilmer, Texas	Texas
9.	Patrick Vahe	6-2/300	OC	Euless, Texas/Trinity	Texas
10.	PJ Mbanasor	6-0/176	CB	Pflugerville, Texas/Hendrickson	Oklahoma
11.	John Burt	6-3/180	WR	Tallahassee, Fla./Lincoln	Texas
12.	Rodney Anderson	6-0/204	RB	Katy, Texas	Oklahoma
13.	Jovon Durante	6-0/162	WR	Hollywood, Fla./Miramar	West Virginia
14.	Will Sunderland	6-3/195	S	Oklahoma City, Okla./Midwest City	Oklahoma
15.	Tyrek Cole	5-11/170	CB	Hollywood, Fla./Miramar	West Virginia
16.	Bobby Evans	6-4/280	OT	Allen, Texas	Oklahoma
17.	JF Thomas	6-4/185	WR	Dallas, Texas/South Oak Cliff	Texas Tech
18.	DeShon Elliott	6-1/200	S	Rockwall, Texas/Heath	Texas
19.	Blake Lynch	6-3/195	WR	Gilmer, Texas	Baylor
20.	Marquis Overton	6-1/301	DT	Jenks, Okla.	Oklahoma

TCU | HORNED FROGS

Big 12 rank: 1 Record: 12-1 Big 12 record: 8-1 (T-1st) Stadium: Amon G. Carter Stadium (45,000)

RANKING 2

HORNED FROGS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Fort Worth, Texas
COACH: Gary Patterson — At TCU and overall: 132-45, 15 years
CO-OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Doug Meacham, Sonny Cumbie
CO-DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Chad Glasgow, DeMontie Cross

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014, co-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2004
RETURNING STARTERS: 17; 10 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Trevone Boykin, RB Aaron Green, WR Josh Doctson, WR Kolby Listenbee, DT Davion Pierson, S Derrick Kindred, CB Ranthony Texada

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Boykin is the driving engine of the offense, but he doesn't have to do it alone. His top playmaking receivers are back, and elusive, fast Green will run behind a massive offensive line populated by four experienced seniors, led by center Joey Hunt. Patterson has called it potentially "the best offensive line we've had since the Rose Bowl."
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Horned Frogs have next-to-no experience at linebacker and safety. Junior Sammy Douglas and freshman Mike Freeze came out as the top linebacker options in the spring. The trick for the new secondary will be figuring out how to quickly diagnose the elite Big 12 passing offenses.

TREVONE BOYKIN
Photo by Steve Beyer

OFFENSE

Trevone Boykin had a year to remember — a school-record 3,901 passing yards and a school-record 33 touchdown passes — but he wasn't happy with his accuracy.

The 2015 Heisman frontrunner spent the offseason working on his throws to the middle of the field and trying to further master the "Air Raid" offense brought in a year ago by Doug Meacham and Sonny Cumbie.

He appears poised for an even more explosive season, although maybe less so on the ground. He ran for 707 yards last year, but the Horned Frogs may try to keep him in the pocket more to reduce the potential for injury.

Aaron Green emerged as the primary ball carrier a year ago as an injury replacement for B.J. Catalon. His stop-and-start elusiveness helped him average 7.1 yards per carry. Still, the Frogs will have him share the load with Kyle Hicks and Shaun Nixon, who missed last season with an ACL injury.

The primary receivers from a year ago, Josh Doctson and Kolby Listenbee, return. Doctson has a habit of coming down with high throws and being nimble in the end zone.

DEFENSE

Like most years, the Horned Frogs figure to have a good defense. This year, it may take a little while to get there. Gary Patterson must replace a highly productive pair of linebackers, All-American Paul Dawson and Marcus Mallett, who combined for over 200 tackles.

In their place are freshman Mike Freeze and junior Sammy Douglas, who have zero starts between them. They are high on Patterson's list, though, because of their athleticism, a premium requirement at linebacker in TCU's 4-2-5 scheme.

At safety, Denzel Johnson and Kenny Iloka look like they'll fit alongside returning starter Derrick Kindred. Torrance Mosley and Corry O'Meally impressed Patterson at cornerback, so one is likely to get a job opposite Ranthony Texada, who started every game last season as a freshman. That is, unless four-star early enrollee DeShawn Raymond suddenly makes a surge in the fall.

> "When they pick you low, you've got to prove them wrong, and when they pick you high, you've got to prove them right."
> — Gary Patterson, on TCU's high expectations

The defensive line took only one hit because of graduation, losing Chucky Hunter at defensive tackle. But Davion Pierson returns and had a strong spring, perhaps the best of the defensive linemen. The outside pass rush comes from James McFarland.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Place-kicker Jaden Oberkrom and punter Ethan Perry are multi-year starters. Oberkrom leads active kickers with 58 field goals and has the Big 12's third-best career percentage from 40-plus (67.7). Perry put 45.3 percent of his punts inside the 20, and the Horned Frogs had only nine punts returned against them, for a combined minus-9 yards.

OVERVIEW

The Horned Frogs have the firepower to reach the College Football Playoff. Perhaps more importantly, they have the reputation, too. Largely seen as being snubbed out of a spot last season, TCU is a known commodity that might get the benefit of the doubt. But the Frogs still have to win, and that may be a white-knuckle ride until the defense rounds into shape.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB Mike Freeze: The freshman appears to have won a job out of the spring. He has the size (6-3, 220) to take on blockers and ball-carriers, but his agility and speed give him a chance to cover backs and tight ends in space. TCU values versatility in its linebackers.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	2	**Trevone Boykin***	6-2	205	Sr.
RB	22	**Aaron Green***	5-11	202	Sr.
WR	9	**Josh Doctson***	6-3	195	Sr.
WR	7	**Kolby Listenbee***	6-1	183	Sr.
WR	13	**Ty Slanina***	6-0	193	Jr.
WR	20	**Deanté Gray***	5-10	175	Sr.
LT	74	**Hala Vaitai***	6-6	308	Sr.
LG	77	**Jamelle Naff***	6-4	325	Sr.
C	55	**Joey Hunt***	6-3	295	Sr.
RG	65	**Brady Foltz***	6-4	320	Sr.
RT	68	Joseph Noteboom	6-5	310	So.

DEFENSE

DL	94	**Josh Carraway***	6-4	250	Jr.
DL	97	Chris Bradley	6-2	255	So.
DL	57	**Davion Pierson***	6-2	305	Sr.
DL	93	Mike Tuaua	6-3	253	Sr.
LB	34	Mike Freeze	6-3	220	Fr.
LB	35	Sammy Douglas	6-3	215	Jr.
CB	11	**Ranthony Texada***	5-10	170	So.
CB	16	Torrance Mosley	5-10	160	So.
S	30	Denzel Johnson	6-2	205	Jr.
S	26	**Derrick Kindred***	5-10	210	Sr.
S	6	Kenny Iloka	6-2	209	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	33	**Jaden Oberkrom***	6-3	187	Sr.
P	37	**Ethan Perry***	6-4	230	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at Minnesota
Sept. 12	STEPHEN F. AUSTIN
Sept. 19	SMU
Sept. 26	at Texas Tech
Oct. 3	TEXAS
Oct. 10	at Kansas State
Oct. 17	at Iowa State
Oct. 29	WEST VIRGINIA
Nov. 7	at Oklahoma State
Nov. 14	KANSAS
Nov. 21	at Oklahoma
Nov. 27	BAYLOR

2014 RESULTS

W	SAMFORD	48-14
W	MINNESOTA	30-7
W	at SMU	56-0
W	OKLAHOMA	37-33
L	at Baylor	58-61
W	OKLAHOMA STATE	42-9
W	TEXAS TECH	82-27
W	at West Virginia	31-30
W	KANSAS STATE	41-20
W	at Kansas	34-30
W	at Texas	48-10
W	IOWA STATE	55-3
	Peach Bowl	
W	vs. Ole Miss	42-3

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	46.5	2
Rushing	206.8	34
Passing	326.2	7
Total	533.0	T-5
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	19.0	8
Rushing	108.8	9
Passing	233.0	T-75
Total	341.8	18
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 18	+ 1.38	3

BAYLOR | BEARS

Big 12 rank: 2 Record: 11-2 Big 12 record: 8-1 (T-1st) Stadium: McLane Stadium (45,140)

RANKING 5

BEARS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Waco, Texas
COACH: Art Briles — At Baylor: 55-34, 7 years; overall: 89-63, 12 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kendal Briles
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Phil Bennett

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014, co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2009
RETURNING STARTERS: 18; 8 offense, 9 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Seth Russell, WR Corey Coleman, WR KD Cannon, OT Spencer Drango, DE Shawn Oakman, DT Andrew Billings, LB Taylor Young, S Orion Stewart

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: With eight starters returning from an offense that led the nation with 581.5 yards and 48.2 points per game, the Bears should put up prolific numbers once again. A receiving corps led by Coleman and Cannon could be the best in the country. Baylor's offensive and defensive lines should also be among the best around.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Baylor's pass defense needs considerable improvement. The Bears believe improved depth at cornerback should keep them fresher late in the season. Russell doesn't have to be an all-star like his predecessors, but a certain level of efficiency and consistency is required.

SHAWN OAKMAN
Photo by Doug Holleman

OFFENSE

With junior Seth Russell stepping in at quarterback, Baylor doesn't expect any drop-off after leading the nation with 581.5 yards and 48.2 points per game last season.

Russell has a tremendous arm and his speed will add an extra dimension to the offense. He saw considerable playing time behind starter Bryce Petty during the last two seasons.

Russell has plenty of talent surrounding him, including Corey Coleman and KD Cannon, who are both coming off 1,000-yard receiving seasons. Redshirt freshman receivers Chris Platt and Ishmael Zamora could have breakout years.

Shock Linwood is one of the top backs in the Big 12 — he ran for 1,252 yards and 16 touchdowns last season — while Johnny Jefferson and Devin Chafin add depth.

Led by All-America left tackle Spencer Drango, Baylor's entire starting offensive line returns intact. Former offensive lineman LaQuan McGowan will be the biggest tight end in the country at 6-7, 410 pounds.

DEFENSE

Baylor's defense got a major boost when defensive end Shawn Oakman decided to return for his senior year. Oakman ranked among the Big 12 leaders with 11 sacks and 19.5 tackles for loss, and he is an imposing sight for opposing quarterbacks.

Oakman's return means the Bears will return their entire starting defensive line, including All-Big 12 tackle Andrew Billings, tackle Beau Blackshear and end Jamal Palmer.

Linebacker Taylor Young, a big surprise as a redshirt freshman last season, is Baylor's leading returning tackler after making 92 stops last year.

The secondary also returns intact with cornerbacks Xavien Howard and Ryan Reid, All-Big 12 free safety Orion Stewart and strong safety Terrell Burt. The Bears focused on developing more depth in the secondary in the spring after ranking 107th nationally last year against the pass.

> "He's shown the ability to help our football team to win with his feet, his arm and his intelligence."
> — Art Briles on QB Seth Russell

Senior Grant Campbell will step in at middle linebacker following the departure of All-Big 12 senior Bryce Hager.

SPECIAL TEAMS

After a slow start as a freshman last season, Chris Callahan ended up making 18 of 26 field goal attempts. His biggest moment was nailing a 28-yard field goal as time expired to lift Baylor to a 61-58 comeback win over TCU.

With All-Big 12 punter Spencer Roth gone, freshman Andrew Galitz will step in at punter. He hit a 71-yard field goal during a practice at Rowlett High School last year.

Jefferson and Zamora are expected to return kicks, while Coleman is a punt return candidate.

OVERVIEW

After winning two straight Big 12 titles, the Bears have their sights set on joining the 2006-08 Oklahoma teams as just the second program in conference history to three-peat. They also hope to get into the College Football Playoff after finishing fifth in the standings last season. With 17 starters returning, including every starter on both the offensive and defensive lines, the Bears expect another great season. However, the performance of Russell will have a lot to say about that.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Ishmael Zamora: The 6-4, 220-pound redshirt freshman will give the Bears a different dimension at receiver with his size and speed. He has impressed coaches with his toughness and work ethic and could also be a threat as a kick returner.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	17	Seth Russell	6-3	220	Jr.
RB	32	**Shock Linwood***	5-9	195	Jr.
WR	1	Corey Coleman	5-11	190	Jr.
WR	9	**KD Cannon***	6-0	175	So.
WR	4	**Jay Lee***	6-3	215	Sr.
TE	41	Tre'Von Armstead	6-6	270	Jr.
LT	58	**Spencer Drango***	6-6	310	Sr.
LG	73	**Blake Muir***	6-6	310	Sr.
C	55	**Kyle Fuller***	6-5	305	Jr.
RG	61	**Jarell Broxton***	6-5	330	Sr.
RT	69	**Pat Colbert***	6-6	305	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	2	**Shawn Oakman***	6-9	280	Sr.
DT	75	**Andrew Billings***	6-2	300	Jr.
DT	95	**Beau Blackshear***	6-4	300	Sr.
DE	92	**Jamal Palmer***	6-3	240	Sr.
LB	11	**Taylor Young***	5-10	225	So.
LB	5	Grant Campbell	6-1	230	Sr.
NB	48	Travon Blanchard	6-2	195	So.
CB	4	**Xavien Howard***	6-2	200	Jr.
CB	9	**Ryan Reid***	5-11	190	Jr.
SS	13	**Terrell Burt***	5-10	185	Sr.
FS	28	**Orion Stewart***	6-2	200	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	40	**Chris Callahan***	5-9	185	So.
P	NA	Andrew Galitz	5-11	180	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	at SMU
Sept. 12	LAMAR
Sept. 26	RICE
Oct. 3	vs. Texas Tech (Arlington, TX)
Oct. 10	at Kansas
Oct. 17	WEST VIRGINIA
Oct. 24	IOWA STATE
Nov. 5	at Kansas State
Nov. 14	OKLAHOMA
Nov. 21	at Oklahoma State
Nov. 27	at TCU
Dec. 5	TEXAS

2014 RESULTS

W	SMU	45-0
W	NORTHWESTERN STATE	70-6
W	at Buffalo	63-21
W	at Iowa State	49-28
W	at Texas	28-7
W	TCU	61-58
L	at West Virginia	27-41
W	KANSAS	60-14
W	at Oklahoma	48-14
W	OKLAHOMA STATE	49-28
W	vs. Texas Tech (Arlington, TX)	48-46
W	KANSAS STATE	38-27
	Cotton Bowl Classic	
L	vs. Michigan State	41-42

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	48.2	1
Rushing	215.5	27
Passing	365.9	4
Total	581.5	1
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.5	48
Rushing	117.7	16
Passing	264.2	107
Total	381.8	50
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 13	+ 1.00	7

OKLAHOMA STATE | COWBOYS

Big 12 rank: 3 Record: 7-6 Big 12 record: 4-5 (7th) Stadium: Boone Pickens Stadium (60,218)

RANKING 18

COWBOYS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Stillwater, Okla.
COACH: Mike Gundy — At OSU and overall: 84-44, 10 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Yurcich
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Glenn Spencer

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2011
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2005
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 6 offense, 7 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Mason Rudolph, WR James Washington, WR Brandon Sheperd, DE Jimmy Bean, DE Emmanuel Ogbah, LB Seth Jacobs, LB Ryan Simmons, CB Kevin Peterson

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Rudolph showed poise in his three games last season. Washington and Sheperd are big-play producers. Ogbah was the Big 12 Defensive Lineman of the Year, and Bean is quick off the edge. Peterson, Ashton Lampkin and Ramon Richards have great coverage potential.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The offensive line was abysmal last season because of unexpected departures, one key injury and players out of position, but it showed signs of improvement. Two impact defensive tackles, James Castleman and Ofa Hautau, are gone.

BRANDON SHEPERD
Photo by Steve Beyer

OFFENSE

Mason Rudolph burned his redshirt with just three games left in his freshman season and helped save the Cowboys from a losing season. He was poised, steady, accurate and evasive, and he could be OSU's best quarterback since Brandon Weeden.

In three starts, he averaged 284.3 passing yards and two touchdowns per game.

Rudolph's playing time coincided with two other factors that should help again in 2015. First, offensive tackle Zachary Crabtree got healthy, allowing Zac Veatch to shift back to tight end and solidify two weaknesses. Second, coach Mike Gundy slimmed down his inconsistent receiver corps and replaced them with tight ends and fullbacks, who helped the offensive line become more physical.

Now, they're all back — 12 players with significant starting experience, including senior quarterback J.W. Walsh.

Brandon Sheperd (39 catches, 737 yards, five TDs) and James Washington (28-456-6) remain the top targets. Jeremy Seaton and Blake Jarwin are versatile H-backs. UAB transfer Victor Salako takes over at left tackle, and the rest of the line is improved.

Now, if Gundy can find a reliable running back among senior Rennie Childs (483 career yards, four TDs) and enticing junior college transfers Todd Mays and Chris Carson, the offense could be riding high again.

DEFENSE

Depth is a problem, but talent is a strength.

Two major holes must be filled: Departed defensive tackles James Castleman and Ofa Hautau were rocks in the middle last season. But OSU has returning talent everywhere else that should be able to cover those spots.

Defensive end Emmanuel Ogbah (49 tackles, including 17 for loss and 11 sacks) was the Big 12 Defensive Lineman of the Year in 2014, and Jimmy Bean is a big-play specialist on the other side.

Free safety Jordan Sterns led the Cowboys with 103 tackles last season, and three-year starting linebacker Ryan Simmons (96 tackles, 12 for loss) is one of the Big 12's best.

> "I'm as excited now, selfishly, personally, as I have been since I've been here."
> — Mike Gundy

Linebacker Seth Jacobs and strong safety Tre Flowers also are capable playmakers.

Cornerback might be OSU's strongest position. Kevin Peterson has All-American potential, and Ashton Lampkin will try to get his starting job back on the opposite side after an injury last season. Ramon Richards ably replaced Lampkin in 2014.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Ben Grogan missed three of his first five field goal attempts, then made 20 of his last 23, including a game-winner in overtime at Oklahoma. His 22 field goals are the third-best single-season total in school history. Reliable punter Kip Smith must be replaced; Zach Sinor and Matt Hockett were the top candidates in the spring.

OVERVIEW

Speedy Tyreek Hill was kicked off the team after a domestic violence arrest, but his punt return touchdown in Norman, Okla., did more than send the game to overtime. It sent the Cowboys to a bowl and re-energized the program. After five straight losses, it created lasting momentum that has carried over into 2015.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Todd Mays: He inherits Tyreek Hill's question mark position: Where will he play? Answer: A little bit of everywhere. Last year at East Mississippi CC, Mays played receiver, running back (5.8 yards per carry, seven TDs) and some quarterback. In 2013, he rushed for 15 touchdowns.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	10	Mason Rudolph	6-4	220	So.
RB	23	Rennie Childs	5-10	205	Jr.
FB	44	**Jeremy Seaton***	6-2	250	Sr.
WR	7	**Brandon Sheperd***	6-1	195	Sr.
WR	28	James Washington	6-0	200	So.
TE	47	Blake Jarwin	6-5	242	Jr.
LT	73	Victor Salako	6-6	330	Jr.
LG	74	**Michael Wilson***	6-6	305	Jr.
C	57	**Paul Lewis***	6-3	295	Jr.
RG	64	Jesse Robinson	6-6	310	So.
RT	60	**Zachary Crabtree***	6-7	305	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	92	**Jimmy Bean***	6-5	250	Sr.
DT	95	Vili Leveni	6-3	290	So.
DT	96	Vincent Taylor	6-3	300	So.
DE	38	**Emmanuel Ogbah***	6-4	275	Jr.
LB	20	Jordan Burton	6-3	215	Jr.
LB	10	**Seth Jacobs***	6-2	225	Jr.
LB	52	**Ryan Simmons***	6-0	240	Sr.
CB	1	**Kevin Peterson***	5-11	190	Sr.
CB	6	Ashton Lampkin	5-11	185	Jr.
SS	31	**Tre Flowers***	6-3	190	So.
FS	13	**Jordan Sterns***	6-1	205	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	19	**Ben Grogan***	6-1	186	Jr.
P	29	Zach Sinor	5-11	195	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at Central Michigan
Sept. 12	CENTRAL ARKANSAS
Sept. 19	UTSA
Sept. 26	at Texas
Oct. 3	KANSAS STATE
Oct. 10	at West Virginia
Oct. 24	KANSAS
Oct. 31	at Texas Tech
Nov. 7	TCU
Nov. 14	at Iowa State
Nov. 21	BAYLOR
Nov. 28	OKLAHOMA

2014 RESULTS

L	vs. Florida State (Arlington, TX)	31-37
W	MISSOURI STATE	40-23
W	UTSA	43-13
W	TEXAS TECH	45-35
W	IOWA STATE	37-20
W	at Kansas	27-20
L	at TCU	9-45
L	WEST VIRGINIA	10-34
L	at Kansas State	14-48
L	TEXAS	7-28
L	at Baylor	28-49
W	at Oklahoma (OT)	38-35
	Cactus Bowl	
W	vs. Washington	30-22

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	27.6	T-73
Rushing	136.6	99
Passing	242.2	53
Total	378.8	82
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	31.2	92
Rushing	162.8	57
Passing	269.2	110
Total	432.0	91
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 8	- 0.62	109

OKLAHOMA | SOONERS

Big 12 rank: 4 Record: 8-5 Big 12 record: 5-4 (T-4th) Stadium: Gaylord Family-Oklahoma Memorial (82,112)

RANKING 21

SOONERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Norman, Okla.
COACH: Bob Stoops — At OU and overall: 168-44, 16 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Lincoln Riley
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Stoops

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2010
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 1998
RETURNING STARTERS: 11; 6 offense, 5 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Samaje Perine, WR Sterling Shepard, C Ty Darlington, LB Eric Striker, LB Dominique Alexander, CB Zack Sanchez

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Led by Perine and Joe Mixon, the Sooners have one of the best stables of running backs in the nation. Shepard is one of the most electric receivers in the country. Striker has elite pass-rush skills. In short, OU still has top-flight talent.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: QB Trevor Knight struggled mightily last year, and there's no knowing if he or transfer Baker Mayfield is the answer OU needs. Shepard has had little help at receiver. The offensive line graduated 105 career starts. The defense set school records for futility last season for the third time in four years.

OFFENSE

For the first time, Bob Stoops fired a coordinator — national championship-winning quarterback Josh Heupel at that — and went back to his roots, hiring East Carolina's Lincoln Riley to install a version of Mike Leach's offense.

Now, who will run it?

Baker Mayfield, the former Texas Tech walk-on who transferred last year after being a 64.1 percent passer at Tech in 2013, is eligible. He still has two years to play and seems best suited for Riley's scheme.

Sugar Bowl star Trevor Knight was uneven as a sophomore — 14 touchdowns and 12 interceptions — and a scary neck injury sidelined him for three games.

Whoever takes snaps has a clear priority: Get the ball to Samaje Perine. He rushed for 1,713 yards and 21 touchdowns as a true freshman last season, including an FBS-record 427 yards against Kansas.

Perine should have company. Five-star recruit Joe Mixon, suspended last season, has been reinstated. Alex Ross and Keith Ford combined for 987 yards and nine touchdowns in 2014.

Last year's offensive line featured three seniors now in the NFL. Center Ty Darlington remains the anchor.

Sterling Shepard (51 catches, 970 yards) is healthy and needs help from the rest of the receiving corps.

DEFENSE

Oklahoma led the Big 12 in rushing defense, but much of that was because opposing offenses knew they could beat the Sooners with the pass. OU ranked ninth in the Big 12 in pass defense, giving up a school-record 276.2 yards per game.

Coordinator Mike Stoops, the head coach's brother, kept his coordinator title, but was reassigned from defensive backs to outside linebackers. He also was moved from the sideline to the coaches' box.

Tackles leader Dominique Alexander is back at middle linebacker, and OU is rich in talent here because Frank Shannon, who led the team in tackles in 2013 but was suspended all of last year, has been reinstated.

ERIC STRIKER
Photo by John Williamson

"I take accountability and responsibility for all of it. It always starts with me and ends with me."

— Bob Stoops

Edge rusher Eric Striker, who made 17 tackles for loss, including nine sacks, should benefit from a shift back to a 4-3 front. Jordan Evans (92 tackles) helps a crowded linebacker picture.

Zack Sanchez (eight career interceptions, 21 pass breakups) leads a troubled secondary. Sophomore Jordan Thomas is the other corner. Safeties Ahmad Thomas, Hatari Byrd and Steven Parker gained much-needed improvement in the offseason.

Charles Tapper is a force at end, but the rest of the line is thin on depth and experience.

SPECIAL TEAMS

After four years of all-time scoring leader Michael Hunnicutt, the Sooners have a new place-kicker. Nick Hodgson looked good in the spring game, but high school star Austin Siebert joins the team in the fall. Jack Steed will battle Siebert for punting duties.

OVERVIEW

After a promising end to the 2013 season, 2014 went splat: three home defeats, another blowout loss to Baylor, a Bedlam upset and a bowl wipeout. Some say Bob Stoops' second housecleaning in four years signaled something of a last stand. It's an important year for Stoops.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Joe Mixon: What does he do with his second chance? Mixon seemed set for stardom last year, but he punched a woman in the face at a local hangout and was suspended for the season. As for football, one OU insider said Mixon looks like Jim Brown.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	6	Baker Mayfield	6-2	214	Jr.
RB	32	**Samaje Perine***	5-11	237	So.
FB	36	**Dimitri Flowers***	6-1	242	So.
WR	3	**Sterling Shepard***	5-10	191	Sr.
WR	5	**Durron Neal***	5-11	195	Sr.
WR	81	Mark Andrews	6-6	247	Fr.
LT	55	Josiah St. John	6-6	309	Sr.
LG	68	Jonathan Alvarez	6-3	310	So.
C	56	**Ty Darlington***	6-2	299	Sr.
RG	54	Nila Kasitati	6-4	315	Sr.
RT	72	Derek Farniok	6-9	345	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	91	**Charles Tapper***	6-4	283	Sr.
DT	93	Jordan Wade	6-4	305	Jr.
DT	92	Matthew Romar	6-0	294	So.
DE	94	Matt Dimon	6-2	274	Jr.
LB	1	**Dominique Alexander***	6-0	229	Jr.
LB	20	Frank Shannon	6-1	230	Jr.
LB	19	**Eric Striker***	6-0	223	Sr.
CB	7	Jordan Thomas	6-1	194	So.
CB	15	**Zack Sanchez***	5-11	175	Jr.
SS	13	**Ahmad Thomas***	6-0	218	Jr.
FS	10	Steven Parker	6-1	201	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	39	Nick Hodgson	6-2	198	Sr.
P	38	Jack Steed	6-5	209	Jr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	AKRON
Sept. 12	at Tennessee
Sept. 19	TULSA
Oct. 3	WEST VIRGINIA
Oct. 10	vs. Texas (Dallas, TX)
Oct. 17	at Kansas State
Oct. 24	TEXAS TECH
Oct. 31	at Kansas
Nov. 7	IOWA STATE
Nov. 14	at Baylor
Nov. 21	TCU
Nov. 28	at Oklahoma State

2014 RESULTS

W	LOUISIANA TECH	48-16
W	at Tulsa	52-7
W	TENNESSEE	34-10
W	at West Virginia	45-33
L	at TCU	33-37
W	vs. Texas (Dallas, TX)	31-25
L	KANSAS STATE	30-31
W	at Iowa State	59-14
L	BAYLOR	14-48
W	at Texas Tech	42-30
W	KANSAS	44-7
L	OKLAHOMA STATE	35-38
	Russell Athletic Bowl	
L	vs. Clemson	6-40

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	36.4	20
Rushing	261.2	10
Passing	203.5	83
Total	464.7	23
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.9	55
Rushing	106.4	8
Passing	276.2	117
Total	382.6	51
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 5	- 0.38	T-95

TEXAS | LONGHORNS

Big 12 rank: 5 Record: 6-7 Big 12 record: 5-4 (T-5th)Stadium: Darrell K. Royal-Texas Memorial (100,119)

RANKING 34

LONGHORNS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Austin, Texas
COACH: Charlie Strong — At Texas: 6-7, 1 year; overall: 43-23, 6 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Joe Wickline
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Vance Bedford
LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2009

LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2010
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 6 offense, 5 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Tyrone Swoopes, RB Johnathan Gray, WR Armanti Foreman, RG Kent Perkins, DT Hassan Ridgeway, LB Malik Jefferson, CB Duke Thomas

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The defensive line is deep, ranking among the best in the Big 12. The offensive line now features 52 returning starts. Gray could finally thrive, given his health and opportunity. Changes on offense will get the ball in space to potential playmakers like senior Daje Johnson, junior Jacorey Warrick and sophomore Armanti Foreman.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The quarterback and the offensive line struggled significantly late in the 2014 season. The returning wide receivers accounted for only 45 percent of the catches at the position in 2014. Finding a new punter is a priority on a special teams unit that underachieved across the board last season.

HASSAN RIDGEWAY
Photo by Cal Sport Media via AP Images

"At some point within the program, we have to understand that it's not acceptable. It's not who we are and it should never be who we are."
— Charlie Strong, on the 2014 season

OFFENSE

Junior Tyrone Swoopes, the 2014 starter, and redshirt freshman Jerrod Heard will compete for the starting quarterback job through fall camp.

Texas has ditched a pro-style approach for a no-huddle, up-tempo attack with a greater emphasis on the quarterback run game. That will benefit both contenders. Swoopes entered the summer as No. 1, although not officially the starter.

A more experienced offensive line now features enough depth that offensive coordinator/offensive line coach Joe Wickline can hold players accountable. So while there are senior starters like left tackle Marcus Hutchins, left guard Sedrick Flowers and center Taylor Doyle, younger players could challenge for playing time if the incumbents fail to make significant improvement.

Running back Johnathan Gray is fully healthy and will be the featured back for the first time in his career. There's plenty of young talent at wide receiver that can emerge behind senior Marcus Johnson. He's the team's leading returning receiver who is striving to finally convert his talent into the on-field production hinted at by his two long touchdowns in 2013 against Oklahoma and TCU.

DEFENSE

The major task facing coach Charlie Strong and his defensive brain trust is replacing six of the team's seven leading tacklers. Gone are first-round draft pick Malcom Brown, defensive end Cedric Reed, both starting linebackers and two starting defensive backs, including four-year starter Quandre Diggs.

At least the defensive line is deep and experienced, led by disruptive junior defensive tackle Hassan Ridgeway and athletic sophomore Naashon Hughes, who could break out in a hybrid role at end. Junior defensive end Bryce Cottrell and sophomore Poona Ford earned praise from Strong during the spring and could become key rotation players, if not starters.

Texas will use only two true linebackers most of the time — along with that hybrid "Fox" end — but both spring starters struggled at times in the 2014 season. The competition there could quickly result in changes if seniors Dalton Santos and Peter Jinkens play poorly.

Meanwhile, young defensive backs will add depth behind former walk-on Dylan Haines, who provided some playmaking at safety by recording four interceptions last season, and emerging senior leader Duke Thomas.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The special teams made numerous critical mistakes last season. Strong reduced the special teams responsibilities of defensive backs coach Chris Vaughn and designated new tight ends coach Jeff Traylor as the head of special teams. Improved accuracy from place-kicker Nick Rose to complement his strong leg would benefit the team greatly, and he looked improved in the spring game, hitting field goals from 49 and 52 yards.

OVERVIEW

Facing a difficult schedule and forced to replace 11 position starters, the Longhorns look to be a year away from competing for the Big 12 title. To push up that timetable, young players will have to grow up quickly, and quarterbacks coach Shawn Watson will have to coax much-improved quarterback play from his two primary options.

TOP NEWCOMER

NB John Bonney: The redshirt freshman will replace Quandre Diggs at the critical nickel back position. Bonney was the top defensive back in Texas's 2014 class, rated as a consensus four-star prospect and the No. 19 safety nationally in the 247Sports Composite.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	18	**Tyrone Swoopes***	6-4	248	Jr.
RB	32	Johnathan Gray	5-11	206	Sr.
WR	7	**Marcus Johnson***	6-1	194	Sr.
WR	11	Jacorey Warrick	5-11	172	Jr.
WR	83	Armanti Foreman	6-0	194	So.
TE	36	Alex De La Torre	6-1	243	Sr.
LT	65	**Marcus Hutchins***	6-5	284	Sr.
LG	66	**Sedrick Flowers***	6-3	319	Sr.
C	74	**Taylor Doyle***	6-4	303	Sr.
RG	76	**Kent Perkins***	6-5	320	Jr.
RT	55	Connor Williams	6-5	290	Fr.

DEFENSE

DE	1	Shiro Davis	6-3	265	Sr.
DT	98	**Hassan Ridgeway***	6-4	320	Jr.
DT	99	Desmond Jackson	6-0	305	Sr.
DE	40	**Naashon Hughes***	6-4	230	So.
LB	55	Dalton Santos	6-3	252	Sr.
LB	19	Peter Jinkens	6-1	236	Sr.
NB	24	John Bonney	5-10	184	Fr.
CB	21	**Duke Thomas***	5-11	175	Sr.
CB	15	Bryson Echols	5-10	181	Jr.
SS	14	**Dylan Haines***	6-1	188	Jr.
FS	31	**Jason Hall***	6-2	205	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	23	**Nick Rose***	6-2	188	Sr.
P	38	Mitchell Becker	6-2	190	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Notre Dame
Sept. 12	RICE
Sept. 19	CALIFORNIA
Sept. 26	OKLAHOMA STATE
Oct. 3	at TCU
Oct. 10	vs. Oklahoma (Dallas, TX)
Oct. 24	KANSAS STATE
Oct. 31	at Iowa State
Nov. 7	KANSAS
Nov. 14	at West Virginia
Nov. 26	TEXAS TECH
Dec. 5	at Baylor

2014 RESULTS

W	NORTH TEXAS	38-7
L	BYU	7-41
L	vs. UCLA (Arlington, TX)	17-20
W	at Kansas	23-0
L	BAYLOR	7-28
L	vs. Oklahoma (Dallas)	26-31
W	IOWA STATE	48-45
L	at Kansas State	0-23
W	at Texas Tech	34-13
W	WEST VIRGINIA	33-16
W	at Oklahoma State	28-7
L	TCU	10-48
	Texas Bowl	
L	vs. Arkansas	7-31

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	21.4	106
Rushing	137.4	98
Passing	199.9	T-88
Total	337.3	110
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	23.8	31
Rushing	164.3	59
Passing	184.2	11
Total	348.5	25
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 3	- 0.23	T-81

WEST VIRGINIA | MOUNTAINEERS

Big 12 rank: 6 Record: 7-6 Big 12 record: 5-4 (T-4th) Stadium: Mountaineer Field at Milan Puskar Stadium (60,000)

RANKING 36

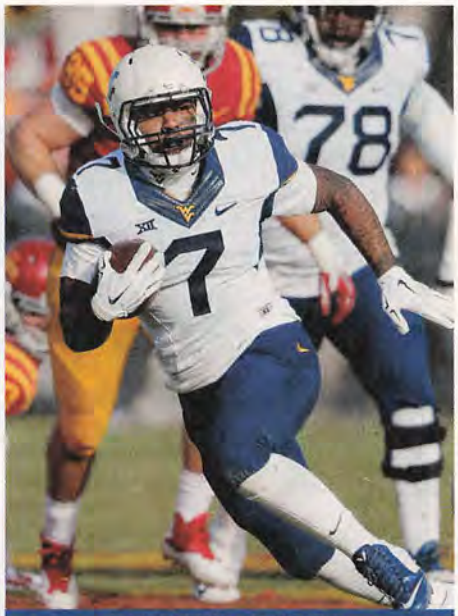
MOUNTAINEERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Morgantown, W.Va.
COACH: Dana Holgorsen — At WVU and overall: 28-23, 4 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Dana Holgorsen
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tony Gibson

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2011, Big East
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 18; 7 offense, 9 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Skyler Howard, RB Rushel Shell, RB Wendell Smallwood, LB Nick Kwiatkoski, CB Daryl Worley, BS Karl Joseph, S K.J. Dillon

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Mountaineers hope to have a pair of 1,000-yard rushers in Shell and Smallwood, who combined for 1,510 yards in 2014. The defense is experienced and physical, with strength at linebacker and in the back end, led by Joseph, a fourth-year starting safety.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: WVU fielded one of the worst pass rushes in the Big 12 last season and is still looking for consistency up front. Losing receivers Kevin White and Mario Alford to the NFL leaves two big holes in the passing game. The Mountaineers have front-line talent but injuries, especially on offense, could derail their season quickly.



RUSHEL SHELL
Photo by AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall

OFFENSE

Quarterback Skyler Howard came off the bench to start the final two games of last season, finishing the year with 829 passing yards, eight touchdowns and no interceptions. Coach Dana Holgorsen wasted little time this spring before giving Howard the nod as the clear-cut No. 1, allowing WVU to focus on issues elsewhere.

The team lost its two top receivers, Kevin White and Mario Alford, to the NFL and spent the spring searching for their replacements. Senior Jordan Thompson (49 catches, 598 yards) is coming off a career year, and junior Daikiel Shorts has been a contributor, but neither has been a primary receiver.

With questions on the outside, the Mountaineers could rely more on the run than previously under Holgorsen. Rushel Shell (788 yards) and Wendell Smallwood (722) could each top 1,000 yards this season. Injuries cost Shell the better part of five games in 2014; Smallwood didn't hit 10 carries in a game until mid-October. If both stay healthy, that 1,000-yard goal is reachable.

The line is still in flux, even with three returning starters. Redshirt junior Tony Matteo (no career starts) emerged at right guard, while redshirt freshman left tackle Yodny Cajuste might have been the surprise of the spring.

DEFENSE

WVU took a major step forward on defense last season and, with nine starters returning, should improve on its 2014 average of 27.6 points allowed.

WVU is so loaded that last year's leading tackler, Nick Kwiatkoski (103 tackles), moved from middle linebacker to strongside linebacker in order to make room for the return of redshirt senior Jared Barber, who missed the 2014 season with an ACL injury. Barber was the team's leading tackler through 10 games in 2013.

The secondary is equally stacked, with WVU bringing back all five starters, including *Lindy's* preseason All-American safety Karl Joseph.

> "I'm not going to hide it. I think we should be great on defense. If we're not, that's directly on me."
>
> — DC Tony Gibson

WVU generated one of the weakest pass rushes in the nation last season, finishing tied for 99th with 20 sacks — and the Mountaineers lost more than half of that production to graduation. Redshirt senior Kyle Rose will anchor the middle of the line. Junior college transfer defensive end Larry Jefferson could be a pass-rush specialist.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Josh Lambert was a Lou Groza Award finalist last season, when he made 4 of 5 field goal attempts from at least 50 yards and led the nation in attempts (39) and makes (30). Punter Nick O'Toole is aiming to bounce back after an up-and-down season.

OVERVIEW

Unlike Holgorsen's previous teams, this one will rely on defense to win games. The offense is capable, but unproven, although naming Howard the frontrunner at quarterback should help generate momentum heading into the fall. After going 10-3 in his first season at WVU, Holgorsen has finished 7-6, 4-8 and 7-6 since then, with no bowl victories. With a new athletic director in Morgantown, this is a big year for the head coach.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Donte Thomas-Williams: He was a four-star recruit after rushing for 2,400 yards and 24 touchdowns as a senior at Hillside High School in Durham, N.C., in 2013. He sat out last season but found his form quickly this spring. While WVU limited reps for their top backs, Thomas-Williams handled the bulk of the carries and earned his coaches' respect.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	3	Skyler Howard	6-0	206	Jr.
RB	7	**Rushel Shell***	5-10	221	Jr.
WR	6	**Daikiel Shorts***	6-1	200	Jr.
WR	1	Shelton Gibson	5-11	188	So.
IR	10	**Jordan Thompson***	5-7	176	Sr.
TE	88	**Cody Clay***	6-4	265	Sr.
LT	50	Yodny Cajuste	6-5	293	Fr.
LG	57	**Adam Pankey***	6-5	312	Jr.
C	65	**Tyler Orlosky***	6-4	297	Jr.
RG	69	Tony Matteo	6-4	296	Jr.
RT	78	**Marquis Lucas***	6-4	318	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	95	Christian Brown	6-2	294	Jr.
NT	95	**Kyle Rose***	6-4	294	Sr.
DE	97	**Noble Nwachukwu***	6-2	271	Jr.
LB	45	**Nick Kwiatkoski***	6-2	235	Sr.
LB	42	**Jared Barber***	6-0	232	Sr.
LB	36	Shaq Petteway	6-0	230	Sr.
CB	7	**Daryl Worley***	6-2	198	Jr.
CB	16	**Terrell Chestnut***	5-11	188	Sr.
SPUR	9	**K.J. Dillon***	6-1	203	Sr.
BS	8	**Karl Joseph***	5-11	197	Sr.
FS	6	**Dravon Henry***	5-11	198	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	86	**Josh Lambert***	5-11	215	Jr.
P	91	**Nick O'Toole***	6-3	228	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Sept. 12	LIBERTY
Sept. 26	MARYLAND
Oct. 3	at Oklahoma
Oct. 10	OKLAHOMA STATE
Oct. 17	at Baylor
Oct. 29	at TCU
Nov. 7	TEXAS TECH
Nov. 14	TEXAS
Nov. 21	at Kansas
Nov. 28	IOWA STATE
Dec. 5	at Kansas State

2014 RESULTS

L	vs. Alabama (Atlanta, Ga.)	23-33
W	TOWSON	54-0
W	at Maryland	40-37
L	OKLAHOMA	33-45
W	KANSAS	33-14
W	at Texas Tech	37-34
W	BAYLOR	41-27
W	at Oklahoma State	34-10
L	TCU	30-31
L	at Texas	16-33
L	KANSAS STATE	20-26
W	at Iowa State	37-24
	Liberty Bowl	
L	vs. Texas A&M	37-45

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	33.5	T-34
Rushing	182.8	43
Passing	317.0	9
Total	499.8	12
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.6	72
Rushing	168.2	63
Passing	231.2	71
Total	399.4	66
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 15	- 1.15	119

KANSAS STATE | WILDCATS

Big 12 rank: 7 Record: 9-4 Big 12 record: 7-2 (3rd) Stadium: Bill Snyder Family Stadium (50,000)

RANKING 43

WILDCATS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Manhattan, Kan.
COACH: Bill Snyder — At Kansas State and overall: 187-94-1, 23 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Del Miller, Dana Dimel
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tom Hayes

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2012
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2009
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 5 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: FB Glenn Gronkowski, OL Cody Whitehair, OL Boston Stiverson, DB/PR Morgan Burns, DB Danzel McDaniel, DT Travis Britz

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Kansas State has capable pass rushers and experienced players in the secondary. The Wildcats return four starters on the offensive line and stud fullback Glenn Gronkowski, a physical blocker and sneaky receiving threat, having averaged nearly 30 yards on his 10 career receptions. If nothing else, K-State should be able to field a physical rushing attack.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: In losing QB Jake Waters and two 1,000-yard receivers (Tyler Lockett and Curry Sexton), there is a daunting absence of playmakers on offense. The running backs have potential, but it's still just potential. Big 12 offenses score points, and it's difficult to see K-State matching scores. Defensive line depth could be an issue.

CODY WHITEHAIR
Photo by John Rivera/Icon Sportswire

"As poorly as we played, I wanted to leave early, too."
— Bill Snyder, on fans leaving the spring game early

OFFENSE

The game plan might be dictated by which quarterback emerges as the starter.

Sophomore Jesse Ertz is more of a pure passer. Joe Hubener is also 6-4, with a rocket arm, but he is known more as a dual-threat physical runner.

Alex Delton, who graduated high school early to take part in spring drills, is 6-1 with next-level speed. While he shows potential to be a capable passer, he certainly will not be as polished this season. If he's taking snaps, K-State would have to use a run-heavy scheme.

At tailback, Charles Jones ran for 540 yards and 13 touchdowns last season. Jarvis Leverett Jr. saw action last season, too. But K-State's most dynamic options are redshirt freshmen Dalvin Warmack and Justin Silmon.

With 1,000-yard receivers Tyler Lockett and Curry Sexton leaving huge holes, the Wildcats need to find starting wide receivers. Seniors Kody Cook, Andre Davis and Kyle Klein are possession receivers. Cook had 251 receiving yards last season.

Deante Burton could emerge after snagging 17 catches last season, and two freshmen are intriguing. Dominique Heath is a 5-9 speedster; Zach Reuter is 6-3 and has added muscle.

Kansas State has the foundation for a solid line, which returns four starters, all seniors. That unit is led by left tackle Cody Whitehair and left guard Boston Stiverson.

DEFENSE

The Wildcats' biggest strength will be in the secondary, where three seniors are returning starters — safety Dante Barnett (176 career tackles), and cornerbacks Danzel McDaniel and Morgan Burns.

K-State lost sure tackler Jonathan Truman from its linebacker corps, and that unit has question marks. Junior Will Davis has experience; junior Charmeachealle Moore is talented, but missed last season with injury. If Elijah Lee successfully makes the transition from situational pass rusher to full-time outside linebacker, this group might exceed expectations.

Defensive ends Jordan Willis and Marquel Bryant are experienced, but both can still raise their level of play. Defensive tackle Travis Britz should provide a physical presence. The other starting tackle likely will be Will Geary, a former walk-on who made five starts last season.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Sophomore Matthew McCrane made 18 of 19 field goal attempts last season, leading the nation with his 94.7 field goal percentage. Sophomore punter Nick Walsh had nine punts of more than 50 yards and landed 15 inside the 20.

Lockett is a huge loss as a returner, but freshman Dominique Heath had a monster spring game with 374 return yards and a touchdown. Senior Morgan Burns returned 12 kickoffs last season for average of 30.7 yards, including an 86-yard touchdown.

OVERVIEW

This looks like a working man's team in a glitz-and-glamour league. Unless Ertz becomes an above-average passer or Alex Delton is paired with a tailback who becomes a surprising star (Dalvin Warmack?), it's difficult to see K-State having enough offense to contend for an upper-tier spot in the Big 12. It creates quite a challenge, even for the brilliant Bill Snyder.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR/PR Dominque Heath: The redshirt freshman could be the next big thing in the Kansas State return game. He had a 75-yard kick return for a touchdown in the spring game and, playing for both squads, led each in all-purpose yards.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	5	Alex Delton	6-1	190	Fr.
RB	24	Charles Jones	5-10	197	Jr.
RB	48	Glenn Gronkowski	6-3	234	Jr.
WR	**6**	**Deante Burton***	**6-2**	**205**	**Jr.**
WR	81	Kyle Klein	6-4	210	Sr.
TE	80	Cody Small	6-4	237	So.
LT	**55**	**Cody Whitehair***	**6-4**	**309**	**Sr.**
LG	**77**	**Boston Stiverson***	**6-4**	**312**	**Sr.**
C	71	Dalton Risner	6-4	302	Fr.
RG	**68**	**Luke Hayes***	**6-6**	**295**	**Sr.**
RT	**65**	**Matt Kleinsorge***	**6-5**	**306**	**Sr.**

DEFENSE

DE	**75**	**Jordan Willis***	**6-5**	**250**	**Jr.**
DT	**95**	**Travis Britz***	**6-4**	**293**	**Sr.**
DT	60	Will Geary	6-0	290	So.
DE	45	Marquel Bryant	6-3	241	Sr.
LB	**35**	**Will Davis***	**6-0**	**223**	**Jr.**
LB	52	Charmeachealle Moore	6-0	217	Jr.
LB	9	Elijah Lee	6-3	214	So.
CB	**7**	**Danzel McDaniel***	**6-1**	**205**	**Sr.**
CB	**33**	**Morgan Burns***	**5-11**	**195**	**Sr.**
SS	24	Nate Jackson	5-11	185	Sr.
FS	**22**	**Dante Barnett***	**6-1**	**186**	**Sr.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**16**	**Matthew McCrane***	**5-10**	**165**	**So.**
P	**14**	**Nick Walsh***	**5-10**	**198**	**So.**

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	SOUTH DAKOTA
Sept. 12	at UTSA
Sept. 19	LOUISIANA TECH
Oct. 3	at Oklahoma State
Oct. 10	TCU
Oct. 17	OKLAHOMA
Oct. 24	at Texas
Nov. 5	BAYLOR
Nov. 14	at Texas Tech
Nov. 21	IOWA STATE
Nov. 28	at Kansas
Dec. 5	WEST VIRGINIA

2014 RESULTS

W	STEPHEN F. AUSTIN	55-16
W	at Iowa State	32-28
L	AUBURN	14-20
W	UTEP	58-28
W	TEXAS TECH	45-13
W	at Oklahoma	31-30
W	TEXAS	23-0
W	OKLAHOMA STATE	48-14
L	at TCU	20-41
W	at West Virginia	26-20
W	KANSAS	51-13
L	at Baylor	27-38
	Alamo Bowl	
L	vs. UCLA	35-40

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	35.8	24
Rushing	134.2	101
Passing	287.4	16
Total	421.6	47
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	23.2	29
Rushing	140.3	33
Passing	229.0	64
Total	369.3	41
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 8	+ 0.62	22

TEXAS TECH | RED RAIDERS

Big 12 rank: 8 Record: 4-8 Big 12 record: 2-7 (8th) Stadium: Jones AT&T Stadium (60,454)

RANKING 47

RED RAIDERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Lubbock, Texas
COACH: Kliff Kingsbury — At Texas Tech and overall: 12-13, 2 years
OFFSENSIVE COORDINATOR: Eric Morris
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: David Gibbs

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1994, Southwest Conference co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2013, Holiday
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 7 offense, 6 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Patrick Mahomes, RB DeAndre Washington, LT Le'Raven Clark, WR Jakeem Grant, DE Pete Robertson, DE Branden Jackson, LB Micah Awe

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The offensive line and stable of running backs are two cornerstones. Robertson and Jackson will bookend the defensive line as possibly the best pass rush duo in recent program history. This team is loaded with veterans, too, including 10 likely starting seniors.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: It's unknown exactly what the Red Raiders will get at quarterback. On defense, the front seven was gashed in the running game last fall, and the defensive line must make huge improvements on the interior. Turnovers and penalties have been monstrous issues over the last two seasons.

PETE ROBERTSON
Photo by Steve Beyer

OFFENSE

Davis Webb started the first eight games of last season at quarterback, but he was up and down before being shut down with a shoulder injury. Patrick Mahomes was impressive in his limited action as a freshman replacement.

The competition will continue into the fall, but with Webb's availability limited as he rehabs his shoulder, Mahomes appears to be the frontrunner. The player with the better ball security will likely win the job.

DeAndre Washington became the first Red Raider running back since 1998 to top 1,000 yards. Washington, a senior, carried the offense at times with his ability to hop and juke on a dime and physically force his way for extra yardage.

Behind him is a stable of talented tailbacks, including sophomore Justin Stockton, who was an electric — but limited — home run threat in 2014. He's put on weight and looks like a great complement.

The line is one of the most experienced in the country; the four starters from left tackle to right guard have started together for the last two years. It all begins with all-conference left tackle Le'Raven Clark.

Jakeem Grant was — and still is — the leader of the receiving group, but dropped balls and inability to gain separation were an issue for him and the rest of the pass catchers last season.

DEFENSE

The interior of the line was porous a year ago, but former junior college transfer Rika Levi has taken a much-needed step forward, and position coach Mike Smith noted him as the defensive line MVP of the spring.

The bookends of the line could be the best pass-rush duo the Red Raiders have had in several years. Pete Robertson, who led the conference in sacks last fall, and Branden Jackson are seniors.

The linebackers will be led by Micah Awe. He was in and out of the lineup as a junior, but he had a great spring.

The secondary regularly gave up big plays last season, but three true freshmen and a true sophomore made up the rotation at corner throughout the year, and they could find great improvement as battle-tested veterans under new coordinator David Gibbs. Sophomore Nigel Bethel II is likely the best of the bunch — an undersized, but scrappy speedster who has all-conference potential.

> "They practice hard, they play hard, they come in to learn and study ... and we'll just keep grinding."
> — Kliff Kingsbury, after spring ball

SPECIAL TEAMS

Taylor Symmank will return as Tech's punter (42.6-yard average last season), and he'll compete with Clayton Hatfield and Michael Barden for place-kicking duties. The two return jobs will almost certainly belong to Grant (two career TD kickoff returns) and Stockton.

OVERVIEW

With a disappointing 4-8 season in the rearview mirror, the Red Raiders have a chance to bounce back behind a big group of experienced veterans, especially on the offensive line. Turnovers and penalties must go down, the offense needs to find consistency with either Patrick Mahomes or Davis Webb, and the defense simply just has to get better in every facet.

TOP NEWCOMER

RT Justin Murphy: He was an under-recruited tackle out of Belton, Texas, in the 2014 class, and after redshirting last fall, offensive line coach Lee Hays is excited to add him to the mix. Murphy is a physical mauler in the run game with a mean streak and a great motor.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	5	**Patrick Mahomes***	6-3	221	So.
RB	21	**DeAndre Washington***	5-8	198	Sr.
WR	6	Devin Lauderdale	6-0	181	Jr.
WR	11	**Jakeem Grant***	5-7	169	Sr.
WR	12	Ian Sadler	5-10	198	So.
WR	2	Reginald Davis	6-0	185	Jr.
LT	62	**Le'Raven Clark***	6-6	316	Sr.
LG	56	**Alfredo Morales***	6-4	310	Sr.
C	75	**Jared Kaster***	6-3	293	Sr.
RG	65	**Baylen Brown***	6-4	310	Jr.
RT	73	Justin Murphy	6-7	296	Fr.

DEFENSE

DE	10	**Pete Robertson***	6-3	238	Sr.
DT	99	Rika Levi	6-2	339	Sr.
DT	90	Keland McElrath	6-4	307	Sr.
DE	9	**Branden Jackson***	6-4	268	Sr.
LB	6	Kris Williams	6-1	228	Jr.
LB	18	Micah Awe	6-0	223	Sr.
LB	25	Sam Atoe	5-11	232	Sr.
CB	1	**Nigel Bethel II***	5-9	184	So.
CB	31	**Justis Nelson***	6-2	179	Jr.
SS	15	**Keenon Ward***	5-9	204	Jr.
FS	3	**J.J. Gaines***	6-0	181	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	42	Taylor Symmank	6-2	192	Sr.
P	42	**Taylor Symmank***	6-2	192	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	SAM HOUSTON STATE
Sept. 12	UTEP
Sept. 19	at Arkansas
Sept. 26	TCU
Oct. 3	vs. Baylor (Arlington, TX)
Oct. 10	IOWA STATE
Oct. 17	at Kansas
Oct. 24	at Oklahoma
Oct. 31	OKLAHOMA STATE
Nov. 7	at West Virginia
Nov. 14	KANSAS STATE
Nov. 26	at Texas

2014 RESULTS

W	CENTRAL ARKANSAS	42-35
W	at UTEP	30-26
L	ARKANSAS	28-49
L	at Oklahoma State	35-45
L	at Kansas State	13-45
L	WEST VIRGINIA	34-37
W	KANSAS	34-21
L	at TCU	27-82
L	TEXAS	13-34
L	OKLAHOMA	30-42
W	at Iowa State	34-31
L	vs. Baylor (Arlington, TX)	46-48

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	30.5	52
Rushing	153.0	80
Passing	351.1	5
Total	504.1	10
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	41.3	123
Rushing	259.5	121
Passing	253.2	95
Total	512.7	122
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 13	- 1.08	T-116

IOWA STATE | CYCLONES

Big 12 rank: 9 Record: 2-10 Big 12 record: 0-9 (10th) Stadium: Jack Trice Stadium (54,800)

RANKING 80

CYCLONES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Ames, Iowa
COACH: Paul Rhoads — At Iowa State and overall: 29-46, 6 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mark Mangino
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Wally Burnham

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1912, Missouri Valley co-champions
LAST BOWL: 2012, Liberty
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 6 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Sam Richardson, WR Quenton Bundrage, WR Allen Lazard, WR D'Vario Montgomery, LT Jake Campos, NG Demond Tucker, MLB Jordan Harris, FS Kamari Cotton-Moya

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Iowa State could possess a potent passing attack. Richardson averaged 243 passing yards per game last season and is near 100 percent after playing much of last season with a shoulder injury. The secondary appears strong, and newcomers are ready to make an impact elsewhere on defense.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The defense again lacks depth and FBS experience after ranking last nationally in total defense. The offense has yet to break its long-standing habit of being at or near the bottom of the Big 12 in scoring.

ALLEN LAZARD
Photo by AP Photo/Justin Hayworth

OFFENSE

Senior quarterback Sam B. Richardson isn't used to entering fall camp as the unequivocal No. 1. He is using his new status to be more vocal.

"It's easy to lead when you're the guy," he said.

Richardson was an 11-game starter last season, completing 254 of 451 passes for 2,669 yards. He was second on the team in rushing with 421 yards, becoming the third quarterback in school history with more than 3,000 yards of total offense.

This season, he'll work with myriad big-play options on the inside and outside. Sophomore 6-5 receiver Allen Lazard and junior D'Vario Montgomery serve as big, capable targets. Record-setting receiver Quenton Bundrage returns after missing almost all of 2014 with a torn ACL.

Iowa State returns three starters on the line, including guard Daniel Burton, who sat out the spring after undergoing knee surgery. Three other key linemen (Brock Dagel, Jacob Dunning and Ryan Glenn) were also out or limited in spring ball, but that allowed reserves such as Wendell Taiese to shine.

As for hitting holes, Iowa State features just three scholarship ball carriers in freshman Mike Warren, and sophomores Tyler Brown and Martinez Syria (who missed most of spring with a neck injury).

DEFENSE

Five starters return from a unit that was last nationally in total defense, but only four emerged from spring ball as No. 1 on the depth chart. What's more, linebacker Luke Knott endured offseason hip surgery again, and his career is in doubt.

It's a mixed bag of experience that returns, and that's where first-year nose guard Demond Tucker and his former Copiah-Lincoln (Miss.) Community College teammate Jordan Harris, a linebacker who redshirted last season, come in.

Harris led the junior college ranks in tackles in 2013, but he sat out last season in order to better acclimate himself to FBS-caliber football. He rose above Kane Seeley, who started five games at middle linebacker last season, on the spring depth chart.

"He's not playing like a physical, missile-attack guy; he's playing like a linebacker and that's what he never did (last year)," coach Paul Rhoads said of Harris.

Tucker, simply put, is a rare talent for Iowa State. If he lives up to his hype, his explosive skills could create a much-needed ripple effect.

As for the veterans, Nigel Tribune is evolving into an elite corner; Sam E. Richardson has greatly improved his disruptive skills at the other cornerback spot; and safety Kamari Cotton-Moya was chosen the Big 12's 2014 Freshman Defensive Player of the Year.

"I'm very confident. I don't worry about my knee at all."
— WR Quenton Bundrage, coming back from an ACL tear

SPECIAL TEAMS

Cole Netten hit 11 of 14 field goal attempts last season, including a career-long 47-yard game-winner at Iowa. Punter Colin Downing averaged 39.4 yards per attempt as a freshman.

OVERVIEW

It's no secret that Iowa State must improve drastically on offense and defense in order to sniff bowl eligibility. The roster is far from bare, and Rhoads has done some good things in Ames, so it's not too much to expect at least a couple of league victories.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Demond Tucker: He compiled 22.5 sacks in two seasons at Copiah-Lincoln (Miss.) Community College, and he was the NJCAA Defensive Player of the Year in 2013. Tucker has a rare blend of speed and power for an Iowa State interior lineman, which he showed in the spring game.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	4	**Sam Richardson***	6-2	214	Sr.
RB	6	Tyler Brown	5-11	186	So.
WR	5	**Allen Lazard***	6-5	218	So.
WR	9	Quenton Bundrage	6-2	192	Sr.
WR	8	**D'Vario Montgomery***	6-6	236	Jr.
TE	95	Ben Boesen	6-5	241	Sr.
LT	67	**Jake Campos***	6-8	295	So.
LG	77	Oni Omoile	6-3	307	Sr.
C	76	**Jamison Lalk***	6-6	311	Sr.
RG	70	**Daniel Burton***	6-6	330	Jr.
RT	72	Brock Dagel	6-8	306	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	45	Dale Pierson	6-2	246	Sr.
NG	97	Demond Tucker	6-0	287	Jr.
DT	94	Devlyn Cousin	6-4	302	Jr.
DE	41	Darius White	6-1	251	Jr.
LB	12	Jarnor "Jay" Jones	6-3	203	Jr.
LB	2	Jordan Harris	6-0	233	Jr.
LB	21	**Luke Knott***	6-1	221	Jr.
CB	4	**Sam E. Richardson***	5-8	189	Sr.
CB	34	**Nigel Tribune***	5-11	188	Jr.
SS	7	Qujuan Floyd	6-0	202	Sr.
FS	5	**Kamari Cotton-Moya***	6-1	194	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	1	**Cole Netten***	6-1	219	Jr.
P	13	**Colin Downing***	5-11	190	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	NORTHERN IOWA
Sept. 12	IOWA
Sept. 19	at Toledo
Oct. 3	KANSAS
Oct. 10	at Texas Tech
Oct. 17	TCU
Oct. 24	at Baylor
Oct. 31	TEXAS
Nov. 7	at Oklahoma
Nov. 14	OKLAHOMA STATE
Nov. 21	at Kansas State
Nov. 28	at West Virginia

2014 RESULTS

L	NORTH DAKOTA STATE	14-34
L	KANSAS STATE	28-32
W	at Iowa	20-17
L	BAYLOR	28-49
L	at Oklahoma State	20-37
W	TOLEDO	37-30
L	at Texas	45-48
L	OKLAHOMA	14-59
L	at Kansas	14-34
L	TEXAS TECH	31-34
L	WEST VIRGINIA	24-37
L	at TCU	3-55

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	23.2	96
Rushing	124.1	105
Passing	248.4	50
Total	372.5	89

DEFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	38.8	115
Rushing	246.3	120
Passing	282.7	119
Total	528.9	125

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	RANK
+ 0	+ 0.00	T-59

KANSAS | JAYHAWKS

Big 12 rank: 10 Record: 3-9 Big 12 record: 1-8 (9th) Stadium: Memorial Stadium (50,071)

RANKING 82

JAYHAWKS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Lawrence, Kan.
COACH: David Beaty — At Kansas and overall: 1st year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Rob Likens
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Clint Bowen

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1998, Big Eight co-champions
LAST BOWL: 2008, Insight
RETURNING STARTERS: 5; 2 offense, 3 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Ke'aun Kinner, TE Ben Johnson, DE Damani Mosby, QB Carter Stanley, DB Tevin Shaw, DT Andrew Bolton, LT Jordan Shelley-Smith

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Beaty's proven ability as a recruiter, coupled with that of his eager, energetic staff, make it possible to see better times on the horizon. His up-tempo, instruction-packed practices have been well received, even by players exhausted at the end of them.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Kansas is so weak at receiver, so untested at quarterback, so unimpressive up front, it projects to have a very difficult time scoring. Even so, the offense might perform better than the defense, which has almost no experience in the secondary and very little at linebacker. The defensive line has potential playmakers and some quickness, but most of those players are on the small side.

OFFENSE

Wearing a red jersey that marked him as off limits, projected starting quarterback Michael Cummings, a senior, suffered a serious knee injury while getting tackled in the spring game. He needed surgery.

That leaves promising freshman Carter Stanley as the favorite. In his lone year as the starter at Vero Beach (Fla.) High, he ran an offense learned by the staff at a coaching clinic run by Tony Franklin. This all connects because Kansas offensive coordinator Rob Likens worked under Franklin at Cal, where Likens was the receivers coach.

So, Stanley has some schematic background to draw upon, and he's an intelligent, dual-threat quarterback who threw for 3,070 yards and 40 touchdowns with seven interceptions as a high school senior.

Junior college transfer Ke'aun Kinner, a small target with breakaway speed and elusiveness, has the inside track on the starting running back job. He made a big impression during spring ball.

Only one player on the roster, senior Tre' Parmalee (four receptions, 21 yards), caught a pass while lined up at wide receiver a year ago. The offensive line, anchored by a high-ceiling athlete (Jordan Shelley-Smith), mostly features natural guards doing their best to masquerade as centers and tackles.

The offense loses receiver Nigel King, who declared early for the NFL draft but was not chosen. Also, wide receiver Rodriguez Coleman and leading rusher Corey Avery appeared headed out of the program at the end of the spring after being suspended indefinitely for violating team rules. It was not Coleman's first such suspension.

DEFENSE

Three defenders — linebacker Ben Heeney, and cornerbacks JaCorey Shepherd and Dexter McDonald — were chosen in the NFL Draft, and the career of the team's most accomplished returning player, linebacker Jake Love, was in jeopardy because of multiple concussions.

BEN GOODMAN
Photo by Dennis Hubbard Icon Sportswire via AP Images

"We can moan and whine and complain about what we don't have or we can go to work with what we do have."
— David Beaty

The only returning starter from coordinator Clint Bowen's 4-2-5 defense is nickel back Tevin Shaw.

The strength of the defense is up front, where Ben Goodman returns as a starter. Long, lean, explosive defensive end Damani Mosby, a junior college transfer who redshirted last season, had a strong spring.

SPECIAL TEAMS

There are plenty of small, fleet athletes from which to fill the return spots. Field goals have been a rarity in recent seasons, and the new coaching staff hopes Tre Honshtein, a preferred walk-on from Texas who nailed a pair of 51-yard field goals in high school, can change that.

OVERVIEW

Talent, experience, coaching and a favorable schedule aligned in 2007, making Kansas the 2008 Orange Bowl champions with a 12-1 record and a No. 7 ranking in the final Associated Press poll. Eight seasons later, with quick-fix recruiting gone bad, an outrageously loaded schedule and precious little experience on both sides of the ball add up to a possible 0-12 record in the first season under rookie head coach David Beaty.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Ke'aun Kinner: He very well could have landed with one of the in-state powerhouses had he made grades out of Little Elm High in Texas, but he went to junior college and earned NJCAA Offensive Player of Year honors in 2014. He'll be a welcome offensive spark for the Jayhawks.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	NA	Carter Stanley	6-2	188	Fr.
RB	22	Ke'aun Kinner	5-9	180	Jr.
WR	11	Tre' Parmalee	5-10	171	Sr.
WR	7	Derrick Neal	5-10	170	So.
WR	12	Darious Crawley	5-11	189	So.
TE	84	Ben Johnson	6-5	234	So.
LT	79	Jordan Shelley-Smith	6-5	296	Jr.
LG	76	Bryan Peters	6-3	298	Sr.
C	**77**	**Joe Gibson***	**6-3**	**293**	**So.**
RG	75	Junior Visinia	6-4	375	So.
RT	**78**	**Larry Mazyck***	**6-8**	**343**	**Sr.**

DEFENSE

DE	**93**	**Ben Goodman Jr.***	**6-3**	**253**	**Sr.**
DT	95	Andrew Bolton	6-3	293	Sr.
DT	90	Kapil Fletcher	6-3	271	Sr.
DE	13	Damani Mosby	6-3	239	Jr.
LB	NA	Marcquis Roberts	6-1	216	Jr.
LB	**28**	**Courtney Arnick***	**6-2**	**207**	**Jr.**
NB	**30**	**Tevin Shaw***	**5-11**	**194**	**Jr.**
CB	NA	Shaquille Richmond	5-11	179	Fr.
CB	8	Brandon Stewart	6-0	171	Jr.
SS	24	Bazie Bates IV	6-1	186	Jr.
FS	22	Greg Allen	5-11	212	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	NA	Tre Honshtein	6-0	185	Fr.
P	18	Eric Kahn	6-5	204	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
Sept. 12	MEMPHIS
Sept. 26	at Rutgers
Oct. 3	at Iowa State
Oct. 10	BAYLOR
Oct. 17	TEXAS TECH
Oct. 24	at Oklahoma State
Oct. 31	OKLAHOMA
Nov. 7	at Texas
Nov. 14	at TCU
Nov. 21	WEST VIRGINIA
Nov. 28	KANSAS STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	SOUTHEAST MISSOURI STATE	34-28
L	at Duke	3-41
W	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	24-10
L	TEXAS	0-23
L	at West Virginia	14-33
L	OKLAHOMA STATE	20-27
L	at Texas Tech	21-34
L	at Baylor	14-60
W	IOWA STATE	34-14
L	TCU	30-34
L	at Oklahoma	7-44
L	at Kansas State	13-51

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	17.8	115
Rushing	121.2	109
Passing	202.9	84
Total	324.1	115
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	33.3	T-104
Rushing	209.7	104
Passing	243.5	86
Total	453.2	106
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 3	+ 0.25	45

PICKING THE C-USA

Time is Right for Western Kentucky to Rise to Top

Just five years ago, Western Kentucky was coming off a two-win season that followed a winless campaign in 2009.

In 2015, the Hilltoppers are poised to capture their first conference championship since becoming a full-fledged FBS program for the 2009 season.

How quickly things can change, at least sometimes.

With the league's top returning quarterback Brandon Doughty among 16 starters returning after being granted a sixth season of eligibility for medical reasons, the Hilltoppers look to unseat Marshall in the East Division after finishing the 2014 campaign on a five-game winning streak.

That big finish featured a 67-66 upset of Conference USA champion Marshall in the last game of the regular season and the school's first postseason victory since the 2003 Division I-AA playoffs, a 49-48 thriller over Central Michigan in the Bahamas Bowl on Christmas Eve.

The Hilltoppers do have some issues they have to deal with on defense after yielding nearly 510 yards per game last year, including 708 to Marshall and 607 to Central Michigan. But it's not as though they are the only team in C-USA with such concerns, and few have the firepower to overcome them like the Hilltoppers.

One that will come close, however, is Marshall. The Thundering Herd lose quarterback Rakeem Cato, but has big-play threats in running backs Devon Johnson, Steward Butler and Remi Watson, and receivers Angelo Jean-Louis, Deon-Tay McManus and Davonte Allen.

Marshall plays division foes Western Kentucky and Middle Tennessee on the road. Western Kentucky not only has Marshall at home, but also gets defending West champion Louisiana Tech in Bowling Green, as well.

Speaking of Louisiana Tech, the Bulldogs will have Florida transfer Jeff Driskel at quarterback to direct an attack that features a returning 1,000-yard rusher in Kenneth Dixon and an 800-plus-yard receiver in Trent Taylor.

The Bulldogs are looking at a rebuilding project on their front seven defensively, but return an outstanding secondary that has three players who will contend for all-conference honors.

The good-offense-questionable-defense scenario has the Bulldogs stewing in the same pot as their top challenger in the West, Rice. The Owls get a schedule break by playing their two toughest league games — Western Kentucky and Louisiana Tech — at home, but that may not be enough to overcome the defensive concerns.

The two teams with the best shot at unseating one of the top four are Middle Tennessee in the East and UTEP in the West. The Blue Raiders return 16 starters, and the Miners have a solid run game to fuel their quest to post back-to-back winning seasons for the first time since 2004-05.

— Paul Borden

CONFERENCE PICKS

C-USA EAST	Good news	Bad news	Our call
1. West Kentucky	Both QB Brandon Doughty and RB Leon Allen return in 2015.	The defense may give up as much as the offense is able to gain.	The Hilltoppers will carry on the momentum they got moving last November.
2. Marshall	Big-play guys return for the Thundering Herd at running back and receiver.	QB Rakeem Cato is gone, and the defense may be a liability.	If they find a quarterback, the Herd won't surrender without a fight.
3. Middle Tenn.	Among the 16 returning starters is the heart of the offense.	The same crew responsible for last year's turnover problems is back.	The Blue Raiders will challenge in the division and get back to a bowl.
4. FIU	The Panthers have some offensive weapons to go with an aggressive defense.	The receiving corps is young and inexperienced, and QBs are even younger.	Even if the offense comes through, the Panthers remain a notch behind the contenders.
5. Old Dominion	Led by sophomore Ray Lawry, the running game has big-play potential.	QB Taylor Heinke is gone, and the defense will have trouble stopping people.	The Monarchs will be fun to watch, and a break-even season looks in the works.
6. FAU	QB Jaquez Johnson is one of the more exciting players in the conference.	The Owls must find a way to keep people from running over them.	An improved run defense could move the Owls up in the division.
7. Charlotte	The 49ers have the tools on offense to make some plays.	Most of the same defensive players who had trouble stopping FCS offenses are returning.	Two wins could be within reach, though not in conference play.
C-USA WEST			
1. Louisiana Tech	The Bulldogs have a top-flight receiver in Trent Taylor and runner in Kenneth Dixon.	Transfer QB Jeff Driskel sounds good, but he was a disappointment at Florida.	If Driskel can't do the job, 2014 backup and 2013 starter Ryan Higgins may be ready.
2. Rice	Driphus Jackson returns to run an offense that also welcomes back its top rushers.	The receiving corps takes a hit, and the defense has many holes to fill.	Getting Louisiana Tech at home could make the difference for the Owls.
3. UTEP	The Miners return 1,000-yard rusher Aaron Jones and defensive star Roy Robertson-Harris.	Wide receiver and the secondary are mysteries going into the fall.	A winning record is within reach if answers are found in the passing game.
4. North Texas	Incumbent Andrew McNulty seems to have settled the situation at quarterback.	There are four new starters on the offensive line, and the secondary is green.	The Mean Green will bounce back from the 4-8 campaign of 2014, but not by much.
5. Southern Miss.	TCU transfer Tyler Mathews and returning starter Nick Mullens have sparked the passing game.	The Eagles took a big hit in personnel losses on defense, particularly up front.	The Eagles are clawing their way back to respectability, but .500 may still be unrealistic.
6. UTSA	RB Jarveon Williams is a triple threat guy in rushing, receiving and returning.	UTSA has to find a quarterback and fill numerous holes on both sides of the ball.	The Roadrunners missed their opportunity in 2014 and now face a long climb back.

Lindy's 2015 ALL-C-USA TEAM

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Brandon Doughty	Sr.	Western Kentucky
RB	Devon Johnson	Sr.	Marshall
RB	Leon Allen	Sr.	Western Kentucky
WR	Jared Dangerfield	Sr.	Western Kentucky
WR	Trent Taylor	Jr.	Louisiana Tech
TE	Jonnu Smith	Jr.	FIU
C	Cameron Tom	Jr.	Southern Miss.
OL	Clint Van Horn	Sr.	Marshall
OL	Darius Johnson	Sr.	Middle Tennessee
OL	Andrew Reue	Sr.	Rice
OL	Tyler Fisher	Jr.	Old Dominion
AP	Aaron Jones	Jr.	UTEP
K	Trevor Moore	So.	North Texas

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	Denzell Perine	Sr.	FIU
DL	Michael Wakefield	Sr.	FIU
DL	Vernon Butler	Sr.	Louisiana Tech
DL	Chad Polk	Sr.	North Texas
LB	T.T. Barber	Sr.	Middle Tennessee
LB	Nick Holt	Sr.	Western Kentucky
LB	TJ Ricks	Jr.	Old Dominion
DB	Richard Leonard	Sr.	FIU
DB	Kevin Byard	Sr.	Middle Tennessee
DB	Xavier Woods	Jr.	Louisiana Tech
DB	Wonderful Terry	Sr.	Western Kentucky
P	Dalton Schomp	Jr.	FAU

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Jaquez Johnson	Sr.	FAU
RB	Ray Lawry	So.	Old Dominion
RB	Kenneth Dixon	Sr.	Louisiana Tech
WR	Carlos Harris	Sr.	North Texas
WR	Zach Pascal	Jr.	Old Dominion
TE	Tyler Higbee	Sr.	Western Kentucky
C	Kaydon Kirby	Jr.	North Texas
OL	Jordan Budwig	Jr.	FIU
OL	Forrest Lamp	Jr.	Western Kentucky
OL	Reggie Bain	So.	FAU
OL	Tyler Fisher	Jr.	Old Dominion
AP	Jarveon Williams	Jr.	UTSA
K	Jay Mattox	Jr.	UTEP

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Vontarrius Dora	Sr.	Louisiana Tech
DL	Trevon Coley	Sr.	FAU
DL	Roy Robertson-Harris	Sr.	UTEP
LB	Davison Colimon	Sr.	FIU
LB	D.J. Hunter	Sr.	Marshall
LB	Alex Lyons	Jr.	Rice
DB	Adairius Barnes	Sr.	Louisiana Tech
DB	Cre'von LeBlanc	Sr.	FAU
DB	Corey Tindall	Jr.	Marshall
DB	Kentrell Brice	Sr.	Louisiana Tech
P	Eric Keena	Jr.	North Texas

THE BIG ONES

Sept. 5	Mississippi State at Southern Mississippi
Sept. 6	Purdue at Marshall
Sept. 10	Louisiana Tech at Western Kentucky
Sept. 19	Louisiana Tech at Kansas State
Sept. 19	Rice at North Texas
Sept. 26	Middle Tennessee at Illinois
Oct. 3	Western Kentucky at Rice
Oct. 10	Middle Tennessee at Western Kentucky
Oct. 24	Middle Tennessee at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 30	Louisiana Tech at Rice
Oct. 31	Florida International at Florida Atlantic
Nov. 6	Rice at UTEP
Nov. 7	Marshall at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 21	Louisiana Tech at UTEP
Nov. 27	Marshall at Western Kentucky

BOWL CONNECTIONS

Gildan New Mexico
C-USA team vs. Mountain West

Miami Beach
C-USA team vs. AAC

Popeyes Bahamas
C-USA team vs. MAC

R&L Carriers New Orleans
C-USA team vs. MAC

St. Petersburg
C-USA team vs. AAC

Zaxby's Heart of Dallas
C-USA team vs. Big Ten

Secondary:
Independence Bowl C-USA team vs. ACC/SEC

TOP 10 NFL TALENT

1. Kenneth Dixon	RB	Sr.	Louisiana Tech	Threat as a receiver as well as runner.
2. Devon Johnson	RB	Sr.	Marshall	Former tight end now a prospect at fullback.
3. Kevin Byard	DB	Sr.	Middle Tennessee	Collects interceptions in bunches.
4. Brandon Doughty	QB	Sr.	Western Kentucky	Extra year should boost draft stock.
5. Jonnu Smith	TE	Jr.	Florida International	Led TEs in receptions, receiving yards in 2014.
6. Leon Allen	RB	Sr.	Western Kentucky	Considered entering 2015 draft.
7. Clint Van Horn	OL	Jr.	Marshall	Key figure on a very good offense.
8. Darius Johnson	OL	Sr.	Middle Tennessee	Can play tackle or guard.
9. Richard Leonard	DB	Sr.	Florida International	Talent makes up for lack of size.
10. T.T. Barber	LB	Sr.	Middle Tennessee	Has added weight, strength in off season.

*Only draft-eligible players included.

Most Valuable Player	Offensive Player of the Year	Defensive Player of the Year	Newcomer of the Year
Brandon Doughty, QB, Western Kentucky	Devon Johnson RB, Marshall	Kevin Byard, DB, Middle Tennessee	Jeff Driskel, QB, Louisiana Tech

HONOR ROLL

Most Accurate Passer	**Brandon Doughty**	**Western Kentucky**
Strongest Arm	**Jeff Driskel**	**Louisiana Tech**
Best Scrambler	**Jaquez Johnson**	**Florida Atlantic**
Coolest in Clutch	**Brandon Doughty**	**Western Kentucky**
Toughest to Bring Down	**Leon Allen**	**Western Kentucky**
Best Hands	**Jared Dangerfield**	**Western Kentucky**
Most Dangerous Deep Threat	**Angelo Jean-Louis**	**Marshall**
Best Pass Blocker	**Clint Van Horn**	**Marshall**
Best Pass Rusher	**Mike Wakefield**	**Florida International**
Best Cover Corner	**Richard Leonard**	**Florida International**
Special Teams Demon	**Carlos Henderson**	**Louisiana Tech**

WESTERN KENTUCKY | HILLTOPPERS

C-USA rank: 1 Record: 8-5 C-USA record: 4-4 (T-3rd, East) Stadium: Houchens Industries-L.T. Smith Stadium (22,113)

RANKING 74

HILLTOPPERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Bowling Green, Ky.
COACH: Jeff Brohm — At Western Kentucky and overall: 8-5, 1 year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tyson Helton
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Nick Holt

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2002, Gateway Football Conference co-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 16; 7 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Brandon Doughty, RB Leon Allen, WR Jared Dangerfield, WR Antwane Grant, WR Taywan Taylor, WR Nicholas Norris, TE Tyler Higbee, DT Jontavious Norris, CB Wonderful Terry

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: There is no reason Western Kentucky shouldn't be one of the top offensive teams in college football. The Hilltoppers have nearly all their primary playmakers back from a season ago, plus serious depth at wide receiver and running back. Brohm's offense is predicated on getting multiple players touches, which makes it extremely difficult to defend.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Depth. WKU is thin at quarterback, offensive line, linebacker and in the secondary. Major injuries to any of those positions could take the Tops from title contender to middle of the pack in Conference USA. Keeping the starting 22 healthy is of the utmost importance this season.

OFFENSE

It's hard to imagine Western Kentucky could put up better numbers than it did in 2014 — but it's possible.

Led by graduate quarterback Brandon Doughty, Western Kentucky has a wealth of talent back on a unit that finished second nationally in passing, fourth in total offense and sixth in scoring. The Hilltoppers scored a whopping 44.4 points per game last season.

Doughty was granted a sixth year of eligibility in the offseason and has a chance to increase his NFL stock with another high-profile campaign. The Davie, Fla., native set 14 records — program or conference — while throwing for 4,830 yards and 49 touchdowns last year.

Doughty has four of his top six wide receivers back, talented tight ends, and his top two running backs returning in Leon Allen and Anthony Wales.

The offensive line lost right tackle Cam Clemmons and has depth issues. Left tackle Forrest Lamp, left guard Brandon Ray and right guard Darrell Williams started in 2014, but there isn't much strength behind them.

DEFENSE

As good as the WKU offense was, the WKU defense was just as bad.

The Hilltoppers allowed 39.9 points per game and ranked 121st in total defense. Perhaps no game epitomized those numbers better than the Bahamas Bowl, when WKU nearly blew a 49-14 fourth-quarter lead against Central Michigan before winning, 49-48.

Perhaps the silver lining is that nearly the entire defense is back, and the addition of UAB transfers Jontavious Morris on the line and T.J. McCollum at linebacker improved the unit's depth.

The most-improved faction of the defense should be the line, with Morris and Bahamas Bowl defensive MVP Derik Overstreet at one end, and Tanner Reeves at the other — along with senior Bryan Shorter at defensive tackle. Western Kentucky's inability to create a pass rush in 2014 was a major issue.

BRANDON DOUGHTY
Photo by Joe Robbins

"Our guys are really coming to work every day knowing that the first three games of the season, we got to be hot right out of the gate."
— Offensive coordinator Tyson Helton

WKU has both safeties — Branden Leston and Marcus Ward — back, along with starting cornerback Prince Charles Iworah and 2014 backup Wonderful Terry. If that group can stay off the injured list, the Hilltoppers should see marked improvement in their pass defense.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior kicker Garrett Schwettman, by virtue of the team's record-setting offense, will go down as one of the highest-scoring players in program history. Punter Joseph Occhipinti needs to have a better year after struggling as a sophomore. The Tops have a pair of dangerous kick returners in Kylen Towner and Nacarius Fant.

OVERVIEW

Expectations have never been higher in Bowling Green. From a team that was 0-12 in 2009 to a team that is now expected to compete for a Conference USA title, Western Kentucky has the perfect storm to make 2015 a memorable one. A non-conference schedule is challenging — Vanderbilt, Indiana and LSU — but league home games with Middle Tennessee, Louisiana Tech and Marshall, sets the stage for WKU to win Conference USA.

TOP NEWCOMER

DL Jontavious Morris: The former UAB standout made 20 tackles — two for a loss — and recovered a fumble last year at UAB. His addition makes the WKU defensive line the deepest unit on that side of the ball. Coaches raved about his play and leadership during spring practice.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	12	**Brandon Doughty***	6-3	216	Sr.
RB	33	**Leon Allen***	6-0	235	Sr.
WR	21	**Jared Dangerfield***	6-3	200	Sr.
WR	3	Antwane Grant	6-1	195	Sr.
WR	2	**Taywan Taylor***	6-1	190	Jr.
TE	82	Tyler Higbee	6-5	233	Sr.
LT	76	**Forrest Lamp***	6-4	296	Jr.
LG	51	**Brandon Ray***	6-3	285	So.
C	70	Max Halpin	6-3	295	Jr.
RG	62	**Darrell Williams***	6-6	310	Jr.
RT	69	Matt Nord	6-6	309	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	72	**Derik Overstreet***	6-2	250	So.
DT	3	Jontavious Morris	6-2	295	Sr.
DT	94	**Bryan Shorter***	6-2	285	Sr.
DE	11	Tanner Reeves	6-4	230	So.
LB	6	T.J. McCollum	6-3	205	So.
LB	10	**Nick Holt***	6-1	230	Sr.
LB	17	**Dejon Brown***	6-3	225	Sr.
CB	5	Wonderful Terry	5-10	180	Sr.
CB	30	**Prince Charles Iworah***	5-11	193	Sr.
S	8	**Marcus Ward***	6-3	202	Jr.
S	31	**Branden Leston***	6-3	215	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	56	**Garrett Schwettman***	5-11	160	Sr.
P	15	**Joseph Occhipinti***	6-3	190	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Vanderbilt
Sept. 10	LOUISIANA TECH
Sept. 19	at Indiana
Sept. 26	MIAMI (OH)
Oct. 3	at Rice
Oct. 10	MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Oct. 15	at North Texas
Oct. 24	at LSU
Oct. 31	at Old Dominion
Nov. 7	FAU
Nov. 21	at FIU
Nov. 27	MARSHALL

2014 RESULTS

W	BOWLING GREEN	59-31
L	at Illinois	34-42
L	at Middle Tennessee	47-50 (3OT)
W	at Navy	36-27
L	UAB	39-42
L	at FAU	38-45
W	OLD DOMINION	66-51
L	at Louisiana Tech	10-59
W	UTEP	35-27
W	ARMY	52-24
W	UTSA	45-7
W	at Marshall (OT)	67-66
	Bahamas Bowl	
W	vs. Central Michigan	49-48

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	44.4	6
Rushing	160.3	67
Passing	374.3	2
Total	534.6	4
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	39.9	121
Rushing	220.8	111
Passing	289.2	121
Total	509.9	120
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 5	+ 0.38	T-37

MARSHALL | THUNDERING HERD

C-USA rank: 2 Record: 13-1 C-USA record: 7-1 (1st, East) Stadium: Joan C. Edwards Stadium (38,016)

RANKING 81

THUNDERING HERD at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Huntington, W.Va.
COACH: Doc Holliday — At Marshall and overall: 40-25, 5 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Bill Legg
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Chuck Heater

RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 6 offense, 5 defense, punter
LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Michael Birdsong, RB Devon Johnson, WR Deon-Tay McManus, OL Clint Van Horn, LB Evan McKelvey, CB Corey Tindal, S Taj Letman, S A.J. Leggett

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Johnson is a juggernaut at running back and should be the focal point of Marshall's offense. Some dynamic receivers will help new quarterback Birdsong get comfortable. So many defensive backs returning should make it tough for teams to pass on the Herd.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: How will Marshall's offense run without QB Rakeem Cato, who knew the scheme like the back of his hand after four years as a starter? The Herd's departures on the defensive line could hurt, especially James Rouse. He was so disruptive, drawing double- and triple-teams, that it allowed the rest of the line freedom to create chaos.

DEVON JOHNSON
Photo by Michael Shroyer-USA TODAY Sports

"Our guys have a lot of confidence and feel good about themselves, but they understand hard work got us to where we are."

— Doc Holliday

OFFENSE

The defending Conference USA champions must replace their career leader in nearly every major passing category, their career leader in receptions and the league's top defensive player.

Still, the Thundering Herd's cupboard isn't bare.

Marshall returns running back Devon Johnson, who rumbled his way to 1,767 yards, 17 touchdowns and a spot on the 2014 Doak Walker Award semifinalist list. Top backup Steward Butler, who rushed for 798 yards and seven scores, was kicked off the team in May.

Top receiver Tommy Shuler (322 catches, fourth all-time nationally) is gone, but Deon-Tay McManus and Angelo Jean-Louis are back after strong freshman seasons. Three starting offensive linemen return, led by all-conference first-team tackle Clint Van Horn.

That should help new starting quarterback Michael Birdsong — Herd coach Doc Holliday anointed him No. 1 two days after spring ball ended — handle the pressure of replacing the decorated Rakeem Cato. Birdsong has 14 games of starting experience at the FCS level, playing two years at James Madison before transferring to Marshall.

DEFENSE

Three of four defensive line starters from last year, including All-C-USA first-teamer James Rouse, are gone. Only tackle Jarquez Samuel returns. The Herd also said goodbye to two key linebackers — conference Defensive Player of the Year Neville Hewitt and All-C-USA second-teamer Jermaine Holmes.

Most of the secondary is back for 2015, but all-conference first-team corner Darryl Roberts, who broke up 17 passes and intercepted another last season, isn't one of them.

Defensive end Gary Thompson, a former C-USA All-Freshman pick who battled injuries last year, will try to help Samuel anchor the defensive front, along with redshirt sophomore end Blake Keller, who transferred from UCF last season. Another transfer, former Maryland linebacker Shawn Petty, will contribute to that unit.

Marshall's linebackers also welcome back Evan McKelvey, who missed most of 2014 to his second season-ending knee injury.

Corey Tindal, Antavis Rowe and Keith Baxter all come back to lead the Herd's cornerbacks. Marshall's starting safeties, A.J. Leggett and Taj Letman, combined for eight interceptions last season.

SPECIAL TEAMS

All-conference punter Tyler Williams enters his fourth year as Marshall's starter. The Herd will feature a new place-kicker, as Justin Haig graduated. Nick Smith entered the spring as the No. 1, but he got a strong challenge from kickoff specialist Amoreto Curraj, who missed last season with bulging discs in his back.

Explosive kick returner Deandre Reaves is back, and Hyleck Foster should step into Tommy Shuler's shoes on punt returns.

OVERVIEW

Marshall's returning cast is strong enough to contend for another Conference USA crown, but there are enough key roles to replace that the Herd won't be the favorite. Marshall's regular-season finale at Western Kentucky — the team that knocked it from the unbeaten ranks last year in a wild overtime game — could very well decide the East Division.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Michael Birdsong: The James Madison transfer is replacing Marshall's career leader in most major passing categories, four-year starter Rakeem Cato. Birdsong has a good bank of starting experience from JMU and a strong arm that should make the Herd's talented wide receivers happy.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	11	Michael Birdsong	6-5	242	Jr.
RB	**47**	**Devon Johnson***	**6-1**	**243**	**Sr.**
WR	2	Hyleck Foster	5-10	191	So.
WR	**3**	**Davonte Allen***	**6-2**	**201**	**Sr.**
WR	16	Deon-Tay McManus	6-2	228	So.
TE	85	Ryan Yurachek	6-3	231	So.
LT	67	Sandley Jean-Felix	6-5	309	So.
LG	**71**	**Sebastian Johansson***	**6-5**	**277**	**Sr.**
C	**54**	**Michael Selby***	**6-2**	**276**	**Jr.**
RG	65	Cody Collins	6-1	283	So.
RT	**78**	**Clint Van Horn***	**6-5**	**295**	**Sr.**

DEFENSE

DE	73	Joe Massaquoi	6-5	254	Jr.
DT	**94**	**Jarquez Samuel***	**6-4**	**290**	**Sr.**
DT	93	Steve Dillon	6-4	278	Sr.
DE	59	Gary Thompson	6-1	258	Jr.
LB	**22**	**D.J. Hunter***	**6-0**	**209**	**Sr.**
LB	45	Raheim Huskey	6-2	218	So.
LB	31	Evan McKelvey	6-2	213	Sr.
CB	**10**	**Corey Tindal***	**5-9**	**183**	**Jr.**
CB	5	Keith Baxter	6-0	195	Sr.
S	**1**	**A.J. Leggett***	**6-0**	**198**	**Jr.**
S	**17**	**Taj Letman***	**6-2**	**189**	**Sr.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	48	Nick Smith	5-10	168	So.
P	**38**	**Tyler Williams***	**6-0**	**200**	**Sr.**

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 6	PURDUE
Sept. 12	at Ohio
Sept. 19	NORFOLK STATE
Sept. 26	at Kent State
Oct. 3	OLD DOMINION
Oct. 10	SOUTHERN MISS
Oct. 17	at FAU
Oct. 24	NORTH TEXAS
Oct. 31	at Charlotte
Nov. 7	at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 14	FIU
Nov. 28	at Western Kentucky

2014 RESULTS

W	at Miami (OH)	42-27
W	RHODE ISLAND	48-7
W	OHIO	44-14
W	at Akron	48-17
W	at Old Dominion	56-14
W	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	49-24
W	at FIU	45-13
W	FAU	35-16
W	at Southern Miss	63-17
W	RICE	41-14
W	at UAB	23-18
L	WESTERN KENTUCKY (OT)	66-67
	C-USA Championship Game	
W	vs. Louisiana Tech	26-23
	Boca Raton Bowl	
W	vs. Northern Illinois	52-23

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	45.6	3
Rushing	271.9	7
Passing	287.3	17
Total	559.2	2
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	21.0	18
Rushing	160.2	53
Passing	196.9	23
Total	357.1	31
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 2	- 0.14	T-71

LOUISIANA TECH | BULLDOGS

C-USA rank: 3 Record: 9-5 C-USA record: 7-1 (1st, West) Stadium: Joe Aillet Stadium 30,600

RANKING 83

BULLDOGS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Ruston, La.
COACH: Skip Holtz — At Louisiana Tech: 13-13, 2 years; overall: 100-84, 15 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tony Petersen
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Blake Baker

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2011, WAC
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 7 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Jeff Driskel, RB Kenneth Dixon, WR Trent Taylor, DT Vernon Butler, DE Vontarrius Dora, CB Adairius Barnes, S Xavier Woods, S Kentrell Brice

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The defense returns plenty from a unit that had an FBS-leading 42 takeaways last year. In Dixon and Taylor, the Bulldogs have two of the best offensive playmakers in the league, and there is plenty of optimism that Driskel will be a big factor after transferring from Florida.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The kicking game isn't great and replicating last year's defensive numbers, at least in terms of takeaways, is probably asking too much. Depth is a concern. The Bulldogs don't catch any scheduling breaks in C-USA play, having to play league favorite Western Kentucky on the road early and top West Division challengers Rice and UTEP on the road late.

KENNETH DIXON
Photo by Ron Kovach

OFFENSE

Louisiana Tech would be satisfied if it had a repeat winner of the league's Newcomer of the Year award.

Iowa transfer quarterback Cody Sokol won the award last year in his only season in Ruston. The hopes are higher for Florida transfer quarterback Jeff Driskel.

He certainly didn't run away from 2013 starter Ryan Higgins in the spring, but if Driskel doesn't win the starting job by opening day, it would be a shock. Whoever is under center, there are weapons around him to make life easier.

Running back Kenneth Dixon is a stud. In 2014, he had 22 rushing touchdowns and 1,299 rushing yards while also proving to be a threat catching the ball (30 receptions, 385 yards, six TDs).

Wideouts Trent Taylor (64 receptions, 834 yards) and Paul Turner (42-514) are back, while sophomore Carlos Henderson has big-play ability (19.6 yards per reception) that should fit nicely with Driskel's big arm.

Three starters return to a line that allowed just 1.36 sacks per game last season (21st in FBS).

DEFENSE

Louisiana Tech's 42 turnovers gained (26 interceptions, 16 fumble recoveries) led the FBS a season ago, and the good news is three of four starters return in a stacked secondary.

Safeties Xavier Woods and Kentrell Brice could both be All-C-USA after the duo combined last year for 157 tackles, eight interceptions and seven forced fumbles. Adairius Barnes had five interceptions at cornerback last season and Bryson Abraham, who should take over at the other corner, had a pair of picks last year, as well.

Defensive tackle Vernon Butler developed into one of the top defensive tackles in the league, especially against the run. Fellow returning starters Aaron Brown (tackle) and Vontarrius Dora (end) help solidify the front line, but depth is a question and Dora will need some help getting to the passer to replace the 10 sacks of departed end Houston Bates.

> "I am more concerned about the backup 22 than the starting 22. That, to me, is the biggest question mark on this team."
> — Coach Skip Holtz

Nick Thomason missed the spring due to injury but is probably the only safe bet to enter fall camp as a starter among the three linebacker positions that are up for grabs. He had 52 tackles (seven for loss) and two interceptions last year. Beau Fitte and C.J. Cleveland are also seniors with experience and likely will join Thomason as starters.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Louisiana Tech has two kickers (Kyle Fischer and Jonathan Barnes) and two punters (Logan McPherson and Gerald Shouse). None is great. None is awful. All will likely play. The return game should be solid with Carlos Henderson (kicks) and Trent Taylor (punts) back.

OVERVIEW

Driskel probably doesn't need to be great considering the other talent at the skill positions. The bigger hurdle for the Bulldogs in their hopes of competing for a league crown will be trying to replicate last year's FBS-leading 42 turnovers gained on defense. Even with plenty of talent there, new coordinator Blake Baker has his work cut out for him.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Jeff Driskel: Never quite lived up to the hype as a Gator, but the Florida transfer certainly has the tools. He has a strong arm and plenty of running ability to be a problem for C-USA defenses.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	8	Jeff Driskel	6-4	234	Sr.
RB	28	**Kenneth Dixon***	5-10	212	Sr.
WR	1	**Carlos Henderson***	5-11	185	So.
WR	3	**Paul Turner***	5-11	190	Sr.
WR	5	**Trent Taylor***	5-8	175	Jr.
TE	44	Josh Gaston	6-3	265	Sr.
LT	77	Jens Danielsen	6-4	283	Sr.
LG	55	David Mahaffey	6-4	310	Jr.
C	73	**Kirby Wixson***	6-4	325	Sr.
RG	62	**Joseph Brunson***	6-4	302	Jr.
RT	75	**Darrell Brown***	6-4	300	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	8	**Vontarrius Dora***	6-4	253	Sr.
DT	98	**Aaron Brown***	6-1	270	Jr.
DT	9	**Vernon Butler***	6-3	309	Sr.
DE	50	Deldrick Canty	6-2	250	So.
LB	6	Beau Fitte	6-0	217	Sr.
LB	24	Nick Thomason	6-1	237	Sr.
LB	29	C.J. Cleveland	6-1	197	Sr.
CB	15	Bryson Abraham	5-9	174	Sr.
CB	21	**Adairius Barnes***	5-11	186	Sr.
S	23	**Kentrell Brice***	5-11	198	Sr.
S	7	**Xavier Woods***	5-11	188	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	10	**Jonathan Barnes***	5-9	168	So.
P	43	**Logan McPherson***	5-10	177	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	SOUTHERN
Sept. 10	at Western Kentucky
Sept. 19	at Kansas State
Sept. 26	FIU
Oct. 3	LOUISIANA
Oct. 10	at UTSA
Oct. 17	at Mississippi State
Oct. 24	MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Oct. 30	at Rice
Nov. 7	NORTH TEXAS
Nov. 21	at UTEP
Nov. 28	SOUTHERN MISS

2014 RESULTS

L	at Oklahoma	16-48
W	at Louisiana	48-20
W	at North Texas	42-21
L	NORTHWESTERN STATE	27-30
L	at Auburn	17-45
W	UTEP	55-3
W	UTSA	27-20
W	at Southern Miss	31-20
W	WESTERN KENTUCKY	59-10
W	at UAB	40-24
L	at Old Dominion (OT)	27-30
W	RICE	76-31
	C-USA Championship Game	
L	vs. Marshall	23-26
	Heart of Dallas Bowl	
W	vs. Illinois	35-18

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	37.4	13
Rushing	148.6	85
Passing	252.2	45
Total	400.8	62
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.7	38
Rushing	118.2	17
Passing	244.3	88
Total	362.5	34
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 16	+ 1.14	5

MIDDLE TENNESSEE | BLUE RAIDERS

C-USA rank: 4 | Record: 6-6 | C-USA: 5-3 (2nd, East) | Stadium: Floyd Stadium (30,788)

RANKING 90

BLUE RAIDERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Murfreesboro, Tenn.
COACH: Rick Stockstill — At MTSU and overall: 57-55, 9 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Buster Faulkner
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tyrone Nix

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2006, Sun Belt co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2013, Armed Forces
RETURNING STARTERS: 16; 7 offense, 8 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Austin Grammer, RB Jordan Parker, WR Ed Batties, LB T.T. Barber, CB Jared Singletary, SS Kevin Byard, FS Xavier Walker

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: There is a ton of experience on both sides of the ball. The offensive line is huge, with all five projected starters topping the 300-pound mark. Grammer is an accurate passer who also is a running threat. Byard is a standout in the secondary. Overall, the defense is a salty bunch with eight seniors and three juniors projected to start.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: With so many starters returning, there aren't many holes to fill. Keeping healthy would be the No. 1 goal. The kicking game could be a concern. The Blue Raiders are looking for a new punter, and returning kicker Cody Clark has been inconsistent. Turnovers were an issue last year.

OFFENSE

Quarterback Austin Grammer returns, which overall is a positive, but it's also not without its downside.

Grammer completed 65.4 percent of his passes last year as a sophomore with 17 touchdowns. He averaged just over 213 yards per game. He also netted 442 yards rushing in his first year as the full-time starter. But he was responsible for 17 turnovers — 12 on interceptions — and, despite his running ability, was sacked 26 times.

A year's experience and the knowledge he doesn't have to do everything for the Blue Raiders should help him eliminate those negative numbers this fall.

Despite the loss of leading rusher Reggie Whatley (767 yards), the Raiders have potential for a strong rushing attack with Jordan Parker (nine starts, 546 yards) and Shane Tucker (486) running behind a line that returns three starters, including senior Darius Johnson, a two-year starter at tackle who is moving to guard.

Senior Ed'Marquis Batties, last year's leading passcatcher with 45 receptions for 474 yards, and junior Terry Pettis (15-241) are returning starters at wide receiver. Tucker (25-351) also is a nice receiving option out of the backfield.

DEFENSE

MTSU's defense had a tendency to wear down in games last season, but with eight starters and several others with playing time returning, that could easily turn around.

Three starters — tackles Patrick McNeil and Shaquille Huff, and end Steven Rhodes — return up front and are joined by Chris Hale, who had a sack in 10 appearances. Rhodes and Huff had two sacks each.

Linebacker T.T. Barber, a second-team All-Conference USA selection, led the Blue Raiders in tackles last year with 72 stops and came up with two interceptions. Another returning starter, Trey Wafford, was credited with 53 tackles.

The leader of the defense is safety Kevin Byard.

AUSTIN GRAMMER
Photo by Jesse Johnson-USA TODAY Sports

"We have to do a better job protecting the football."
— Coach Rick Stockstill

A first-team all-conference selection, Byard had six interceptions last year, the most in the league, and tied for seventh-most in the country. He is one of three returning starters in the secondary, which also welcomes back safety Xavier Walker (67 tackles) and cornerback Jared Singletary (two interceptions). Jamarcus Howard came out of spring No. 1 at the other corner. All are seniors.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Junior Cody Clark is back after going 9 of 15 on field-goal attempts, making him 21 of 31 for his career. His career long is only 43 yards, however, and he goes into 2015 having missed his past four attempts over the last five games. Incoming freshman Trevor Owens is ticketed for punting duty.

OVERVIEW

The Blue Raiders were bowl eligible at 6-6, but were passed on when it came to postseason invitations. Despite trips to Alabama and Illinois, the schedule is favorable for a move up in the bowl pecking order in 2015, especially if the offense can hang onto the football.

TOP NEWCOMER

LT Carlos Johnson: A redshirt freshman, Johnson came out of the spring as the starter on the left side of the line. He was credited with 75 pancake blocks and gave up no sacks during his senior year at Nashville's Pearl Cohn High School.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	2	**Austin Grammer***	6-2	205	Jr.
RB	6	**Jordan Parker***	6-1	222	Sr.
WR	80	**Ed'Marques Batties***	6-0	197	Sr.
WR	87	Richie James	5-9	170	Fr.
WR	84	**Terry Pettis***	6-5	232	Jr.
WR	81	Christian Collis	6-0	217	Sr.
LT	58	Carlos Johnson	6-3	303	Fr.
LG	75	**Darius Johnson***	6-3	305	Sr.
C	63	**Josh Chester***	6-3	305	Jr.
RG	66	**Daniel Stephens***	6-2	303	Jr.
RT	56	Maurquice Shakir	6-3	318	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	59	Chris Hale	6-4	274	Jr.
DT	92	**Patrick McNeil***	6-1	320	Sr.
DT	51	**Shaquille Huff***	6-1	320	Jr.
DE	49	**Steven Rhodes***	6-3	256	Jr.
LB	8	**Trey Wafford***	5-10	202	Sr.
LB	24	Cavellis Luckett	6-0	254	Sr.
LB	38	**T.T. Barber***	6-1	229	Sr.
CB	4	**Jared Singletary***	5-8	173	Sr.
CB	21	Jamarcus Howard	6-0	185	Sr.
SS	20	**Kevin Byard***	5-11	226	Sr.
FS	42	**Xavier Walker***	6-4	212	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	87	**Cody Clark***	6-1	180	Jr.
P	29	Trevor Owens	6-0	204	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	JACKSON STATE
Sept. 12	at Alabama
Sept. 19	CHARLOTTE
Sept. 26	at Illinois
Oct. 3	VANDERBILT
Oct. 10	at Western Kentucky
Oct. 17	FIU
Oct. 24	at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 7	MARSHALL
Nov. 14	at FAU
Nov. 21	NORTH TEXAS
Nov. 28	at UTSA

2014 RESULTS

W	SAVANNAH STATE	61-7
L	at Minnesota	24-35
W	WESTERN KENTUCKY (OT)	50-47
L	at Memphis	17-36
W	at Old Dominion	41-28
W	SOUTHERN MISS	37-31
L	at Marshall	24-49
W	UAB	34-22
L	BYU	7-27
L	at FIU	28-38
W	FAU	35-34
L	at UTEP	21-24

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	31.6	46
Rushing	213.8	30
Passing	217.5	74
Total	431.3	43
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	31.5	94
Rushing	182.6	80
Passing	269.7	111
Total	452.3	105
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 4	- 0.3	T-92

RICE | OWLS

C-USA rank: 5 Record: 8-5 C-USA record: 5-2 (T-2nd, West) Stadium: Rice Stadium (47,000)

RANKING 91

OWLS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Houston
COACH: David Bailiff — At Rice: 48-53, 8 years; overall: 69-68, 11 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Larry Edmondson/Billy Lynch
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Chris Thurmond

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2013
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2011
RETURNING STARTERS: 10; 5 offense, 3 defense, punter, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Driphus Jackson, RB Jowan Davis, WR Dennis Parks, DE Graysen Schantz, LB Alex Lyons

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Key playmakers return on offense. None made a bigger impact last season than Jackson. Only one returning starting quarterback in Conference USA was a more efficient passer than Jackson. The team's less experienced players have benefitted from the extra work that comes with playing in three consecutive bowl games.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Rice hasn't been known as a defensive stalwart the past few seasons, and this year's defense will be particularly green. The interior defensive line is especially thin; one tackle left Rice for a shot at the NFL, the other for a six-figure engineering job. Special teams play continues to be, at best, mediocre for the Owls.

OFFENSE

David Bailiff and his staff have more new players to break into Rice's system this year, but uncertainty isn't a problem at quarterback.

Senior Driphus Jackson, a dual-threat who shined in a reserve role during his first two years, made a seamless transition to starter last season. He threw for 2,842 yards and 24 touchdowns, and had eight interceptions, while completing close to 60 percent of his passes.

Jackson is joined in the backfield by powerful and compact Jowan Davis, the team's leading rusher (956 yards), and Darik Dillard, who led Rice with 12 touchdowns last year.

But Rice lost its top two receivers, including last year's team MVP, Jordan Taylor. Senior wideout Dennis Parks might fill his go-to role. Parks was banged up last year, but he led the team in yards per reception (17.5) in 2013.

Right tackle Caleb Williams and left guard Andrew Reue, both seniors, are the only returning starters on the line. Six of the players on the offensive line's two-deep are underclassmen.

DEFENSE

Rice's middling defense was strongest against the run a year ago. This year's group could have a completely different personality. Only three starters return — linebacker Alex Lyons, cornerback Ryan Pollard and nose tackle Ross Winship.

Lyons led Rice in tackles (71) and fumble recoveries (two). Pollard tied for the team lead in interceptions with two. Creating turnovers will again be critical. Rice can be generous at times. The Owls surrendered more than 40 points four times last year.

Winship and Stuart Mouchantaf, who is returning from a knee injury, will be called upon to provide senior leadership along the thin defensive line. Almost all the rest of the top contenders for the defensive line rotation are underclassmen, led by end Graysen Schantz, one of Conference USA's top freshmen a year ago.

DRIPHUS JACKSON
Photo by Danny Wild-USA TODAY Sports

"I'm excited about the future."
— David Bailiff

Several players will be vying for starting jobs in the secondary, particularly at safety. Destri White, who plays the hybrid linebacker/safety position for Rice, had a strong offseason. J.T. Ibe, a redshirt freshman safety, could also see a lot of action.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Rice made only 13 of 20 field goal attempts last season, although James Farrimond made 8 of 11 and hit all seven attempts from inside 40. He is back, but the team signed Jack Fox, one of the top-rated kickers in the county. Farrimond handled the punting, averaging 42 yards.

OVERVIEW

Rice isn't making national headlines, but the Owls are riding the best three-year run in the program's history. Bailiff's teams have amassed 25 wins since 2012 and appeared in three consecutive bowl games (a school record). This is a mid-level program looking to keep momentum. Rice is in the process of a major stadium renovation, and the program is loaded with young players for what should be another competitive team.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Zach Abercrumbia: Coach David Bailiff calls the 6-2, 265-pound Abercrumbia an "explosive" and "tenacious" player, capable of making plays from sideline to sideline. With questions about Rice's inexperienced interior defensive lineman, Abercrumbia could make an immediate impact.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	6	**Driphus Jackson***	6-0	210	Sr.
RB	3	**Jowan Davis***	5-7	200	Jr.
WR	4	**Dennis Parks***	6-2	200	Sr.
WR	12	Temi Alaka	6-2	200	So.
WR	9	Zach Wright	6-1	200	Jr.
TE	87	Connor Cella	6-3	255	Jr.
LT	66	Calvin Anderson	6-5	255	Fr.
LG	77	**Andrew Reue***	6-5	295	Sr.
C	52	Spencer Stanley	6-3	290	Jr.
RG	51	Peter Godber	6-3	300	So.
RT	75	**Caleb Williams***	6-3	290	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	44	Brian Womac	6-3	240	So.
NT	99	**Ross Winship***	6-4	290	Sr.
DT	92	Stuart Mouchantaf	6-4	290	Sr.
DE	94	Graysen Schantz	6-3	240	So.
LB	46	Nick Elder	6-0	225	Sr.
LB	4	**Alex Lyons***	6-0	225	Jr.
CB	22	**Ryan Pollard***	5-8	175	Sr.
CB	19	V.J. Banks	6-1	185	So.
S	6	Zach Espinosa	6-2	220	Sr.
S	28	Cole Thomas	6-2	220	So.
S	13	Destri White	6-0	205	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	27	**James Farrimond***	6-0	220	Sr.
P	27	**James Farrimond***	6-0	220	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	WAGNER
Sept. 12	at Texas
Sept. 19	at North Texas
Sept. 26	at Baylor
Oct. 3	WESTERN KENTUCKY
Oct. 10	at FAU
Oct. 24	ARMY
Oct. 30	LOUISIANA TECH
Nov. 6	at UTEP
Nov. 14	SOUTHERN MISS
Nov. 21	at UTSA
Nov. 28	CHARLOTTE

2014 RESULTS

L	at Notre Dame	17-48
L	at Texas A&M	10-38
L	OLD DOMINION	42-45
W	at Southern Miss	41-23
W	HAWAII	28-14
W	at Army	41-21
W	NORTH TEXAS	41-21
W	at FIU	31-17
W	UTSA	17-7
L	at Marshall	14-41
W	UTEP	31-13
L	at Louisiana Tech	31-76
	Hawaii Bowl	
W	vs. Fresno State	30-6

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	28.8	63
Rushing	167.8	57
Passing	231.5	62
Total	399.2	65
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	28.5	80
Rushing	152.5	45
Passing	233.4	77
Total	385.9	54
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 8	+ 0.62	T-22

UTEP | MINERS

C-USA rank: 6 Record: 7-6 C-USA record: 5-3 (T-2nd, West) Stadium: Sun Bowl (51,500)

RANKING 94

MINERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: El Paso, Texas
COACH: Sean Kugler — At UTEP and overall: 9-6, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Patrick Higgins
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Scott Stoker

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2000, WAC
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 6 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Aaron Jones, WR Autrey Golden, LG Will Hernandez, RG Derek Elmendorff, DE Roy Robertson-Harris, DE Nick Usher, LB Alvin Jones, S Devin Cockrell

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Running — both the ball and clock — is what UTEP does best. The Miners like giving Jones plenty of carries behind a big offensive front, both as their primary scoring weapon and as a means of keeping opposing offenses off the field. The defense starts with a solid front four led by Robertson-Harris.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The lack of experience in the passing game is a concern, both behind center and at wide receiver/tight end. UTEP can't run the entire game. On defense, the secondary lost three productive starters and will be tested plenty.

AARON JONES
Photo by Ivan Pierre Aguirre-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Texas-El Paso has certainly taken on the personality of its coach. Sean Kugler, a gritty, tough, longtime offensive line coach in the NFL and college, has quickly molded the identity of the team into a run-first, physical, old-school offense.

The Miners are built around a punishing line that paved the way for 207.8 rushing yards per game in 2014, including 1,321 from star running back Aaron Jones, one of the best in Conference USA.

Not only is Jones back, but many of his bodyguards are, too. Darrin Laufasa returns after starting all 13 games at fullback, and four return on a line that averages 306 pounds.

Quarterback and receiver are a different matter. Mack Leftwich, the son of assistant head coach/offensive line coach Spencer Leftwich, will likely get the starting nod at quarterback after redshirting in 2014. He started four games in 2013, although he wasn't spectacular.

His relative inexperience won't be helped by the fact that UTEP has no returning receiver or tight end who caught more than six passes last year. Autrey Golden was moved to receiver after having 31 receptions as a running back last year.

DEFENSE

The Miners ranked fourth in total defense in C-USA a season ago, but part of that was due to the snail's pace at which the offense is run. So while allowing just 368.1 yards per game is a good start, realize that was against a conference-low 760 plays run against them, leaving a painful 6.3 yards per play to deal with.

The defensive front returns three of four starters, including senior Roy Robertson-Harris, who had a team-best 9.5 tackles for loss last season. He and junior Nick Usher on the other end (5.5 TFLs, three sacks) are good starting points for UTEP's 4-2-5 scheme.

Linebacker Alvin Jones is the team's leading returning tackler (55, nine TFLs) and has a chance to continue to develop into one of the league's better all-around players at that position.

> "We've signed 10 linemen. Get used to it because that's what we are going to do every year. We are going to be a physical team."
>
> — Sean Kugler

The secondary returns just one of five starters in safety Devin Cockrell, though Dashone Smith started five games and has enough experience to help. Still, it may be asking too much for the Miners to again lead C-USA in pass defense (191.2 passing yards allowed per game on just 51.7 percent completion rate).

SPECIAL TEAMS

Junior Jay Mattox returns as kicker and punter; he's solid at both. His 81.2 percent field goal rate (13 of 16) was second in the league last year. With Golden moving to starting receiver, his role as a return man may diminish, but he's still a threat.

OVERVIEW

The Miners will have to get something — anything — out of the passing game to make a run at back-to-back winning seasons for the first time since 2004-05. A stout offensive line should pave the way for Jones, one of the best backs in the league. If the defense can be solid, the Miners should be back in bowl contention.

TOP NEWCOMER

TE M.J. McFarland: The 6-5, 250-pound senior transfer from Texas will have every opportunity to win a job. There isn't much in terms of returning pass catchers on the roster, and McFarland is looking to prove he can do much more than just block; though in this offense it helps that he can do that well, too. He played in 36 games with eight starts at Texas and returns to his hometown trying to prove a point.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	16	Mack Leftwich	5-10	190	So.
RB	29	**Aaron Jones***	5-10	185	Jr.
FB	30	**Darrin Laufasa***	6-1	235	Jr.
WR	8	Autrey Golden	5-11	180	Sr.
WR	83	Tyler Batson	6-0	195	So.
TE	11	M.J. McFarland	6-5	250	Sr.
LT	70	Jerome Daniels	6-3	295	Jr.
LG	76	**Will Hernandez***	6-3	320	So.
C	60	**Eric Lee***	6-1	295	Sr.
RG	75	**Derek Elmendorff***	6-3	310	So.
RT	74	**John De La Rosa***	6-6	310	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	36	**Nick Usher***	6-3	235	Jr.
DT	92	Alex Villarreal	6-4	300	Sr.
NT	63	**Gino Bresolin***	6-2	285	Jr.
DE	43	**Roy Robertson-Harris***	6-7	255	Sr.
LB	10	Jimmy Musgrave	6-0	235	Sr.
LB	16	**Alvin Jones***	5-10	215	So.
CB	3	Traun Roberson	6-0	195	Sr.
CB	2	Ishmael Harrison	6-0	195	Jr.
WS	27	**Devin Cockrell***	5-11	190	Jr.
SS	32	LaQuintus Dowell	5-10	205	Sr.
FS	21	Dashone Smith	6-0	200	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	47	**Jay Mattox***	6-0	185	Jr.
P	47	**Jay Mattox***	6-0	185	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Arkansas
Sept. 12	at Texas Tech
Sept. 19	at New Mexico State
Sept. 26	INCARNATE WORD
Oct. 3	UTSA
Oct. 10	at FIU
Oct. 24	FAU
Oct. 31	at Southern Miss
Nov. 6	RICE
Nov. 14	at Old Dominion
Nov. 21	LOUISIANA TECH
Nov. 28	at North Texas

2014 RESULTS

W	at New Mexico	31-24
L	TEXAS TECH	26-30
W	NEW MEXICO STATE	42-24
L	at Kansas State	28-58
L	at Louisiana Tech	3-55
W	OLD DOMINION	42-35
W	at UTSA	34-0
W	SOUTHERN MISS	35-14
L	at Western Kentucky	27-35
W	NORTH TEXAS	35-17
L	at Rice	13-31
W	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	24-21
	New Mexico Bowl	
L	vs. Utah State	6-21

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	26.6	81
Rushing	207.8	33
Passing	142.9	118
Total	350.7	105
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	28.1	T-75
Rushing	176.8	77
Passing	191.2	15
Total	368.1	38
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 9	+ 0.69	18

FLORIDA INT'L | GOLDEN PANTHERS

C-USA rank: 7 | Record: 4-8 | C-USA record: 3-5 (6th, East) | Stadium: FIU Stadium (20,000)

RANKING 98

GOLDEN PANTHERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Miami, Fla.
COACH: Ron Turner — At FIU: 5-19, 2 years; overall: 47-80, 11 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Steve Shankweiler
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Matt House

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2010, Sun Belt co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2010, Little Caesars
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 5 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Alex McGough, RB Anthon Samuel, TE Jonnu Smith, TE Akil Dan-Fodio, LB Treyvon Williams, LB Davison Colimon, LB Anthony Wint, CB Richard Leonard

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Panthers have depth at running back, a young but experienced quarterback, and an all-conference candidate at tight end in Smith. There's also depth at tight end, and the offensive line looks solid. The defense, particularly at linebacker, should improve.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The big question on offense is at wide receiver. No starters return, and newcomers will have to produce. Only one returnee had more than 10 catches last year (Dennis Turner, 11 for 89 yards). The defense has a tendency to give up big plays, and two of the three new starters on the unit are safeties.

OFFENSE

Florida International struggled mightily on offense in the first half of the 2014 season, particularly when it came to running the ball.

The Panthers rushed for only 43 yards in the opener, a second straight loss to FCS foe Bethune-Cookman, and got into triple digits only once in their first four games (148 yards vs. FCS foe Wagner). But by the second half of the year, the Panthers were posting respectable numbers (256 vs. Old Dominion, 185 vs. Florida Atlantic, and 177 vs. C-USC champion Marshall).

Running back Anthon Samuel was largely responsible for that surge, rushing for 404 of his total of 582 yards over the last five games. He returns for his senior season along with sophomore Alex Gardner, who rushed for 582 yards in starting seven of the eight games he was healthy. Sophomore Napoleon Maxwell is another option.

FIU appears set at quarterback with Alex McGough, who started 11 games as a true freshman in 2014. He had some rough moments along with some good ones (17 of 24, 231 yards in a win over Middle Tennessee). He re-established his spot in the spring.

FIU has three good tight ends in Jonnu Smith, Ya'keem Griner and Akil Dan-Fodio. Smith had 61 receptions for 710 yards to lead the team.

DEFENSE

FIU takes an aggressive approach on defense. That often makes the Panthers susceptible to big plays, but only four opponents managed to top 400 yards in total offense. Unfortunately, three of those letdowns came in the last five games of the season and included a 525-yard debacle in a loss to Old Dominion.

The Panthers return eight starters, plus end Denzell Perine, who had five starts. Three returning starters — seniors Mike Wakefield and Lars Koht and junior Imarjaye Albury — join Perine up front. Wakefield was the team's sack leader with eight and Perine was right behind with 6.5.

ALEX MCGOUGH
Photo by Steve Mitchell-USA TODAY Sports

"I'm excited about where we are. I think each year we have taken strides."
— Coach Ron Turner

Sophomore linebacker Anthony Wint is back from a knee injury that cut short his season. He had 48 tackles in nine games, second among returnees to Treyvon Williams' 50.

The grizzled veteran of the unit is cornerback Richard Leonard, who comes into his senior season with nine career interceptions, six of them last year. He also is an excellent kick returner.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Junior Austin Taylor was 15 of 21 on field-goal attempts last year and is 23 of 33 in his career. Senior Jose Laphitzondo and junior Chris Ayers shared punting duties last year, with Laphitzondo averaging 40.7 yards on 59 attempts and Ayers 35.3 yards on 23.

OVERVIEW

After the disastrous 1-11 campaign of 2013, the Panthers demonstrated progress with four wins last year, and three of the losses were by a total of nine points. If they get good play from their receivers, they should be better in 2015, though getting to six wins and bowl eligibility would be a stretch.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Anthony Jones: The freshman, from football factory Miami Central High, reported early and showed in the spring he could contribute right away at a position of need. He caught 32 passes and ran for 1,007 yards last season for Central's Class 6A state champions.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	12	**Alex McGough***	6-3	215	So.
RB	42	Anthon Samuel	5-11	200	Sr.
WR	5	Clinton Taylor	5-10	169	Sr.
WR	81	Thomas Owens	6-1	196	So.
TE	87	**Jonnu Smith***	6-3	230	Jr.
TE	11	Akil Dan-Fodio	6-4	225	Sr.
LT	78	**Dieugot Joseph***	6-6	294	Jr.
LG	66	**Jordan Budwig***	6-4	324	Jr.
C	70	**Aaron Nielsen***	6-4	290	Sr.
RG	73	Trenton Saunders	6-4	290	Jr.
RT	75	Edens Sineace	6-5	303	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	55	**Michael Wakefield***	6-3	254	Sr.
DT	74	**Lars Koht***	6-5	283	Sr.
DT	93	**Imarjaye Albury***	6-0	277	Jr.
DE	11	Denzell Perine	6-3	256	Sr.
LB	35	**Davison Colimon***	6-1	217	Sr.
LB	52	**Treyvon Williams***	5-11	229	Jr.
LB	53	**Anthony Wint***	6-0	224	So.
CB	3	**Richard Leonard***	5-9	189	Sr.
CB	7	**Jeremiah McKinnon***	6-0	194	Sr.
S	18	Jordan Davis	6-1	218	Jr.
S	28	Deonte Wilson	6-0	190	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	43	**Austin Taylor***	5-8	170	Jr.
P	49	**Jose Laphitzondo***	6-3	184	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at UCF
Sept. 12	at Indiana
Sept. 19	NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL
Sept. 26	at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 3	at Massachusetts
Oct. 10	UTEP
Oct. 17	at Middle Tennessee
Oct. 24	OLD DOMINION
Oct. 31	at FAU
Nov. 7	CHARLOTTE
Nov. 14	at Marshall
Nov. 21	WESTERN KENTUCKY

2014 RESULTS

L	BETHUNE-COOKMAN	12-14
W	WAGNER	34-3
L	PITTSBURGH	25-42
L	LOUISVILLE	3-34
W	at UAB	34-20
W	FAU	38-10
L	at UTSA	13-16
L	MARSHALL	13-45
L	RICE	17-31
L	at Old Dominion	35-38
W	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	38-28
L	at North Texas	14-17

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	23.0	T-98
Rushing	125.2	104
Passing	168.0	113
Total	293.2	120
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.8	40
Rushing	160.4	54
Passing	203.3	29
Total	363.8	35
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 11	+ 0.9	8

OLD DOMINION | MONARCHS

C-USA rank: 8 Record: 6-6 overall C-USA: 4-4 (T-3rd, East) Stadium: Foreman Field (20,118)

RANKING 104

MONARCHS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Norfolk, Va.
COACH: Bobby Wilder: At ODU and overall: 52-20, 6 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brian Scott
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Rich Nagy

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: None
LAST BOWL: None
RETURNING STARTERS: 16; 8 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Shuler Bentley, RB Ray Lawry, WR David Washington, OT Connor Mewbourne, DT Rashaad Coward, LB T.J. Ricks, CB Devon Brown, S Fellonte Misher

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Lawry ran for 947 yards as a true freshman, even though he hardly played in the first five games. He is a powerful runner with great breakaway speed. Bentley won the quarterback position in spring practice with a strong performance. Washington, a converted quarterback, is a potential all-conference receiver. Coward has NFL potential and had a good offseason.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: This will be one of the youngest teams in the nation. There are only 10 seniors, and more than half of the 105 players who will report to preseason camp have never played in a college football game. Last year's team was poised — the Monarchs won four games on the final play of the game — but such fortune and composure isn't likely to repeat itself.

RAY LAWRY
Photo by AP Photo/The News & Observer, Ethan Hyman

"We're a very young team, but I like the camaraderie in our locker room. That will help us when we experience the growing pains we're going to face."
— Coach Bobby Wilder

OFFENSE

Employing an Oregon-like spread offense, Old Dominion has been a wide-open, up-tempo scoring machine over the past four seasons, even as it moved up from the Football Championship Subdivision to the Football Bowl Subdivision.

But Taylor Heinicke, a four-year starter who passed for 14,959 yards, sixth most in Division I history, is gone. ODU also loses key starters in wide receiver Antonio Vaughan, the school's career pass-receiving leader, and center Josh Mann. Both were All-Conference USA.

Heinicke will be replaced with promising redshirt freshman Shuler Bentley as the offense is changing to a more ground-oriented attack. Expect ODU to feature tailback Ray Lawry, the Conference USA Rookie of the Year last season, as its go-to offensive player. ODU will at times use more traditional formations, including a tight end — something rarely seen during Heinicke's four seasons.

The line, led by senior tackle Connor Mewbourne, has its best depth in seven seasons of ODU football. Mason Halter, a 6-8, 300-pound two-time FCS All-American at Fordham, is slated to transfer to ODU this summer and likely will start.

Most of the receivers are back, including Blair Roberts, who missed last season because of a back injury; he is one of the school's career receiving leaders. David Washington and Zach Pascal combined for 106 catches for 1,342 yards and 11 touchdowns last year.

DEFENSE

The defense, woeful for much of the past three seasons, showed signs of improvement in the final three games of 2014, all victories.

Yet, the defense is young. Of the 16 defensive backs, 11 are underclassmen; seven of the 15 defensive linemen are freshmen or redshirt freshmen.

ODU had little pass rush last year and just five interceptions. Redshirt freshmen ends Daniel Appouh and Oshane Ximines, both three-star recruits, could help apply pressure.

ODU has quality defensive tackles in Rashaad Coward, Bunmi Rotimi and Galen Evans.

Depth at linebacker has been an issue in recent years. Middle linebacker T.J. Ricks, a former walk-on, was ODU's best tackler in spring practice.

Help in the secondary comes from UAB transfer cornerback Devon Brown, who won a starting position in the spring.

SPECIAL TEAMS

ODU struggled at times on special teams last season, especially on kickoff returns and coverage. Ricky Segers returns at place-kicker, although he is coming off knee surgery. Jarrett Cervi or Satchel Ziffer likely will punt. Redshirt freshman Isaiah Harper, a 5-8 former track star, is likely to return punts and kickoffs.

OVERVIEW

ODU finished 6-6 in its first FBS season and appears to have a more favorable schedule. The Monarchs have seven home games, and their only game against a power conference team — NC State — will be played in Norfolk. The Conference USA schedule is less challenging — last season the Monarchs were on the road for five weeks, including two trips to Texas in the same month. This is a young team with major holes to fill, yet six victories is a reasonable goal.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Shuler Bentley: The redshirt freshman was a two-time South Carolina Gatorade Player of the Year who passed for 13,245 yards and 177 touchdowns in three seasons at Byrnes High in Duncan. Bentley ran a spread offense in high school similar to ODU's and soaked in all he could last season while redshirting behind Taylor Heinicke.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	19	Shuler Bentley	6-1	209	Fr.
RB	**33**	**Ray Lawry***	**5-10**	**205**	**So.**
WR	**6**	**Zach Pascal***	**6-2**	**217**	**Jr.**
WR	**10**	**David Washington***	**6-3**	**209**	**Jr.**
WR	2	Marques Little	5-9	180	So.
WR	1	Melvin Vaughn	6-2	248	Jr.
LT	**71**	**Connor Mewbourne***	**6-4**	**287**	**Sr.**
LG	**70**	**Tyler Fisher***	**6-4**	**323**	**Jr.**
C	**66**	**Troy Butler***	**6-3**	**320**	**Jr.**
RG	**65**	**Tyler Burns***	**6-6**	**370**	**Sr.**
RT	**78**	**Darius Garcia***	**6-3**	**311**	**So.**

DEFENSE

DE	**95**	**Poncho Barnwell***	**6-4**	**270**	**So.**
NT	**57**	**Rashaad Coward***	**6-6**	**297**	**Jr.**
DT	58	Bunmi Rotimi	6-4	283	So.
DE	**96**	**Terrell Reid***	**6-2**	**277**	**Jr.**
LB	45	Shadow Williams	6-0	218	Jr.
LB	**47**	**T.J. Ricks***	**6-0**	**226**	**Jr.**
LB	**36**	**Martez Simpson***	**6-1**	**222**	**Sr.**
CB	14	Aquante Thornton	5-9	170	Sr.
CB	19	Devon Brown	5-11	180	Jr.
SS	**24**	**Fellonte Misher***	**6-2**	**214**	**Sr.**
FS	13	Justice Davila	6-0	191	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**38**	**Ricky Segers***	**6-2**	**202**	**Jr.**
P	**39**	**Jarrett Cervi***	**6-1**	**219**	**So.**

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Eastern Michigan
Sept. 12	NORFOLK STATE
Sept. 19	NC STATE
Sept. 26	APPALACHIAN STATE
Oct. 3	at Marshall
Oct. 17	CHARLOTTE
Oct. 24	at FIU
Oct. 31	WESTERN KENTUCKY
Nov. 7	at UTSA
Nov. 14	UTEP
Nov. 21	at Southern Miss
Nov. 28	FAU

2014 RESULTS

W	HAMPTON	41-28
L	at NC State	34-46
W	EASTERN MICHIGAN	17-3
W	at Rice	45-42
L	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	28-41
L	MARSHALL	14-56
L	at UTEP	35-42
L	at Western Kentucky	51-66
L	at Vanderbilt	28-42
W	FIU	38-35
W	LOUISIANA TECH (OT)	30-27
W	at FAU	31-28

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	32.7	N/A
Rushing	149.4	N/A
Passing	292.5	N/A
Total	441.9	N/A
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	38.0	N/A
Rushing	222.5	N/A
Passing	229.7	N/A
Total	452.2	N/A
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 1	- 0.08	N/A

FLORIDA ATLANTIC | OWLS

C-USA rank: 9 Record: 3-9 C-USA record: 2-6 (7th, East) Stadium: FAU Stadium (29,419)

RANKING 109

OWLS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Boca Raton, Fla.
COACH: Charlie Partridge — At FAU and overall: 3-9, 1 year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brian Wright
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Roc Bellantoni

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2007
LAST BOWL: 2008, Motor City
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 6 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Jaquez Johnson, RB Jay Warren, WR Jenson Stoshak, WR Kalib Woods, DE Trey Hendrickson, DT Trevon Coley, CB Cre'von LeBlanc

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The experience at quarterback, running back and on the offensive line will give the Owls a chance to improve on last year's three-win total. The defense looks solid enough up front with sack leaders Trey Hendrickson and Trevon Coley returning.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Running backs Jay Warren and Greg Howell must stay healthy. Wide receiver is a largely unproven position with a lack of experienced depth. There are big holes to be filled at linebacker; the secondary, while it has potential, must grow up fast.

JAQUEZ JOHNSON
Photo by Michael Shroyer-USA TODAY Sports

"Our O-line is much better and our D-line continues to improve."
— Coach Charlie Partridge

OFFENSE

Florida Atlantic looks to make a big jump offensively after finishing in the bottom half of the conference in scoring (10th) and total offense (ninth) in 2014.

Senior Jaquez Johnson enters his third season as the starting quarterback after rushing for 513 yards — No. 2 on the team — and passing for more than 201 yards a game last year.

Running back is set with the return of leading rusher Jay Warren (571 yards) and sophomore Greg Howell, who worked his way into the rotation late last year and finished with 253 yards rushing in just three games.

A big plus is that they will run behind a line that returns four starters — senior Mikingson Marsaille, junior Dillon DeBoer, and sophomores Reggie Bain and Joe Gold.

The negative is that wide receiver is a largely unproven area with only one starter returning — senior Jenson Stoshak (37 receptions, 508 yards, two touchdowns). Sophomore Kalib Woods, however, flashed some potential with 16 catches in seven games (five starts), but senior Derek Moise was the only other receiver in double figures in receptions last year with 10.

DEFENSE

The Owls return nearly as many starters on defense (five) as they do on offense, but the unit has more concerns.

Three of the returning starters are up front with defensive ends Robinson Eugene and Trey Hendrickson and tackle Trevon Coley. Hendrickson has been a feast-or-famine kind of guy, but he led the team in sacks with five in 2014. Coley was right behind with four among his 53 tackles.

The loss of Andrae Kirk (103 tackles, 10.5 for losses) leaves a huge void at linebacker. Junior Robert Relf (65 tackles in 11 starts) returns, and Nate Ozdemir, who played in 10 games as a redshirt freshman last year, is a promising player.

The secondary also had key losses in safeties Damian Parms and Christian Milstead and cornerback D'Joun Smith, but senior Cre'von LeBlanc (two interceptions) returns at one of the corners, and senior Sharrod Neasman (two picks) takes one of the safety spots after serving as last year's starting nickel back.

Junior safety Lester Thomas finished the spring on a high note, and sophomore Raekwon Williams figures to man the other corner.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Junior Greg Joseph was 14 of 20 on field-goal attempts in his first season, but his longest make was from 43 yards. He missed tries from 45 and 47 yards. Junior punter Dalton Schomp will compete again for all-conference honors after earning second-team recognition with his 45.4-yard average.

OVERVIEW

If they find the answers at wide receiver, the Owls should step up on offense, but the issues on defense could hold them back. Despite a home game against Miami the second week, the early schedule is friendlier than last year when they opened at Nebraska and Alabama and were outscored 96-7.

TOP NEWCOMER

RT Kelly Parfitt: He sat out last season after transferring from UCF. Parfitt (6-6, 313) is a hometown product out of Boca Raton's American Heritage High and was a key member of the 2011 Florida Class 3A champions. He came out of spring No. 1 on the depth chart.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	**32**	**Jaquez Johnson***	**6-1**	**225**	**Sr.**
RB	25	Jay Warren	6-0	205	Jr.
WR	**88**	**Jenson Stoshak***	**6-1**	**195**	**Sr.**
WR	83	Tony Thomas	5-10	190	Jr.
WR	81	Kalib Woods	6-3	193	So.
TE	80	Nate Terry	6-6	210	So.
LT	**58**	**Reggie Bain***	**6-4**	**295**	**So.**
LG	**73**	**Mikingson Marsaille***	**6-6**	**320**	**Sr.**
C	**51**	**Joe Gold***	**6-3**	**270**	**So.**
RG	**66**	**Dillon DeBoer***	**6-6**	**295**	**Jr.**
RT	76	Kelly Parfitt	6-6	313	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	**59**	**Robinson Eugene***	**6-5**	**266**	**Sr.**
DT	**11**	**Trevon Coley***	**6-2**	**300**	**Sr.**
DT	54	Ray Ellis	6-1	260	So.
DE	**9**	**Trey Hendrickson***	**6-4**	**250**	**Jr.**
LB	34	Freedom Whitfield	6-2	200	Sr.
LB	50	Nate Ozdemir	6-2	230	So.
LB	**43**	**Robert Relf***	**6-3**	**220**	**Jr.**
CB	23	Raekwon Williams	5-11	180	So.
CB	**7**	**Cre'von LeBlanc***	**5-10**	**195**	**Sr.**
SS	29	Sharrod Neasman	6-0	198	Sr.
FS	24	Lester Thomas	5-10	165	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**17**	**Greg Joseph***	**6-1**	**210**	**Jr.**
P	**67**	**Dalton Schomp***	**6-1**	**220**	**Jr.**

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Tulsa
Sept. 11	MIAMI
Sept. 19	BUFFALO
Sept. 26	at Charlotte
Oct. 10	RICE
Oct. 17	MARSHALL
Oct. 24	at UTEP
Oct. 31	FIU
Nov. 7	at Western Kentucky
Nov. 14	MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Nov. 21	at Florida
Nov. 28	at Old Dominion

2014 RESULTS

L	at Nebraska	7-55
L	at Alabama	0-41
W	TULSA	50-21
L	at Wyoming	19-20
W	UTSA	41-37
L	at FIU	10-38
W	WESTERN KENTUCKY	45-38
L	at Marshall	16-35
L	UAB	28-31
L	at North Texas	10-31
L	at Middle Tennessee	34-35
L	OLD DOMINION	28-31

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	24.0	94
Rushing	163.6	60
Passing	199.5	90
Total	363.1	101
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	34.4	108
Rushing	222.1	112
Passing	238.7	84
Total	460.8	110
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 3	- 0.3	T-85

NORTH TEXAS | MEAN GREEN

C-USA rank: 10 Record: 4-8 C-USA record: 2-6 (5th, West) Stadium: Apogee Stadium (30,850)

RANKING 110

MEAN GREEN at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Denton, Texas
COACH: Dan McCarney — At North Texas: 22-27, 4 years; overall: 78-112, 17 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Canales
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Chris Cosh

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2004, Sun Belt
LAST BOWL: 2013, Heart of Dallas
RETURNING STARTERS: 10; 5 offense, 3 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Andrew McNulty, RB Jeffrey Wilson, WR Turner Smily, WR Carlos Harris, LB Fred Scott, CB Kenny Buyers, DE Jarrian Roberts

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Experience in the passing game. McNulty didn't light it up last season, but he should at least be used to the speed of the game. It helps that he has playmakers at wide receiver. If he gets time to throw, the Mean Green could be a much improved passing team.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Lack of proven playmakers in the defensive front seven. Although Orr and Roberts combined for a handful of sacks and Scott posted 54 total tackles, North Texas doesn't have many returning stoppers in the middle of its defense. It's also a little undersized in the starting lineup.

OFFENSE

North Texas' ability to move the ball hinges on its reconstructed offensive line, where four new starters get their chance. The early indications are the new guys look up to the task of replacing long-time starters.

"We lost four of our starters — and not just starters, but stalwarts, guys that have been here since almost the day I took the job at North Texas," coach Dan McCarney said.

The Mean Green returns leading passer Andrew McNulty, but he needs to be more productive in order for UNT to move forward in 2015. McNulty passed for 1,295 yards with seven interceptions and six touchdowns in 10 games last season.

At running back, the Mean Green will count on sophomore Jeffrey Wilson, who was impressive late last season, although the team's leading rusher, Antoinne Jimmerson (589 yards) won't give up the starting job without a fight.

UNT's strength on offense will be its returning wideouts as four of the top five receivers in catches and yards are back. The leader, by far, is Carlos Harris (70 catches, 863 yards). Wide receiver Turner Smiley, not listed as a starter coming out of the spring, nonetheless caught three touchdown passes in the spring game.

DEFENSE

The Mean Green lacks many returning players who filled holes in the middle of the defense last season.

Jarrian Roberts, Austin Orr and Fred Scott do represent three bright spots in the front seven for new coordinator Chris Cosh. Roberts and Orr posted two sacks apiece last season, and Scott returns to start at linebacker, where he made 27 solo and 27 assisted stops in 2014.

Cornerback Kenny Buyers is the team's leading returning tackler as he recorded 37 solo and 18 assisted tackles. Buyers also grabbed two interceptions last season. Junior college transfer safety James Gray enrolled during the winter and earned a starting spot with an impressive spring.

Sophomore safety Kishawn McClain, who started three games last season, is another up-and-comer.

ANTOINNE JIMMERSON
Photo by Ray Carlin-USA TODAY Sports

"I really see strives and improvement on that offensive line."
— Dan McCarney

SPECIAL TEAMS

Trevor Moore led the team in scoring last season, nailing all 37 extra point attempts and showing remarkable consistency on field goals, making 15 of 17. Eric Keena averaged 44.8 yards on 43 punts last season. Darvin Kidsy had a 100-yard kick return touchdown and a 75-yard punt return touchdown last season.

OVERVIEW

The Mean Green posted a convincing 43-6 win over SMU in the second game of last season. But the Mustangs proved to be a bit of a pushover and North Texas never really clicked like that the rest of the way.

If UNT is to make any progress, it will have to do it with a lot of fresh faces. McNulty took command of the quarterback position last season and continued to look strong in the spring. His numbers will need to improve significantly for UNT to make progress. The good news for McNulty is that there are plenty of experienced targets running pass routes.

TOP NEWCOMER

DB James Gray: The transfer from Fort Scott (Kan.) Community College nailed down a starting spot on the Mean Green depth chart coming out of the spring. He had 60 tackles and four interceptions last season for Fort Scott.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	5	**Andrew McNulty***	6-1	209	Sr.
RB	26	Jeffrey Wilson	6-0	190	So.
WR	1	Turner Smiley	6-0	185	Jr.
WR	9	**Carlos Harris***	5-8	183	Sr.
WR	4	**Darvin Kidsy***	6-0	182	Jr.
TE	18	**Marcus Smith***	6-4	247	Sr.
LT	66	Michael Banogu	6-5	282	Sr.
LG	64	Sam Rice	6-4	302	Jr.
C	50	**Kaydon Kirby***	6-3	329	Jr.
RG	65	Micah Thompson	6-4	310	Sr.
RT	67	Chris Miles	6-4	291	Fr.
DEFENSE					
DE	30	Jarrian Roberts	6-2	240	Jr.
DT	94	Mustafa Haboul	6-0	267	Jr.
DT	91	**Austin Orr***	6-4	277	Sr.
DE	99	Andy Flusche	6-3	261	So.
LB	27	Blake Bean	6-1	218	Sr.
LB	32	**Fred Scott***	5-11	238	Jr.
LB	3	Calvin Minor	6-3	219	So.
CB	31	**Kenny Buyers***	5-11	186	Sr.
CB	16	Chad Davis	5-10	184	Jr.
SS	21	James Gray	6-0	200	Jr.
FS	34	Kishawn McClain	5-11	193	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	30	**Trevor Moore***	5-11	175	So.
P	84	**Eric Keena***	6-2	170	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 12	at SMU
Sept. 19	RICE
Sept. 26	at Iowa
Oct. 3	at Southern Miss
Oct. 10	PORTLAND STATE
Oct. 15	WESTERN KENTUCKY
Oct. 24	at Marshall
Oct. 31	UTSA
Nov. 7	at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 14	at Tennessee
Nov. 21	at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 28	UTEP

2014 RESULTS

L	at Texas	7-38
W	SMU	43-6
L	LOUISIANA TECH	21-42
W	NICHOLLS STATE	77-3
L	at Indiana	24-49
L	at UAB	21-56
L	SOUTHERN MISS	20-30
L	at Rice	21-41
W	FAU	31-10
L	at UTEP	17-35
W	FIU	17-14
L	at UTSA	27-34

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	27.2	76
Rushing	153.2	T-77
Passing	172.8	109
Total	325.9	114
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	29.8	T-84
Rushing	161.8	56
Passing	207.7	34
Total	369.4	42
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 0	+ 0.0	T-59

SOUTHERN MISS | GOLDEN EAGLES

C-USA rank: 11 Record: 3-9 C-USA record: 1-7 (6th, West) Stadium: Carlisle-Faulkner Field at M.M. Roberts Stadium (36,000)

RANKING 113

GOLDEN EAGLES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Hattiesburg, Miss.
COACH: Todd Monken — At Southern Miss and overall: 4-20, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Chip Lindsey
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: David Duggan

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2011
LAST BOWL: 2011, Hawaii
RETURNING STARTERS: 11; 7 offense, 3 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Ito Smith, WR Michael Thomas, WR D.J. Thompson, LT Rashod Hill , DE Dylan Bradley, LB D'Nerius Antoine, S Devonta Foster, LB Brian Anderson

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: For a program trying to return to relevance, continuity will be a big plus. Monken and the bulk of his staff are in their third season in Hattiesburg. The passing game will continue to be the team's biggest advantage. Thomas, with a full offseason under his belt (unlike in 2014), could have a monster year. Defensively, the addition of at least three mid-year junior college transfers to the starting lineup will be huge.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The run game has struggled the past two seasons, and after senior Jalen Richard missed the bulk of spring with academic issues and junior George Payne potentially facing a long recovery from an injury, the team will need Smith and Tez Parks to step up. Problem is, Smith and Parks are just sophomores.

NICK MULLENS
Photo by Ray Carlin-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Southern Miss' quarterback competition dominated the headlines during spring camp. And rightfully so.

Junior Nick Mullens has performed well in the 16 games he's started in the last 18 Southern Miss contests. But here comes Tyler Matthews, who transferred last season from TCU after it became clear Trevone Boykin had Heisman potential. Matthews, a big guy with a strong arm, struggled with consistency throughout much of the spring, while Mullens was his usual, steady self.

In the spring game, however, Matthews turned it on. Mullens also played well, but Matthews' intangibles and ability to make things happen when a play breaks down gave a sense of what he brings to the table.

A decision by the coaches likely will be made in camp.

Southern Miss also made big strides in terms of depth along the offensive line and at receiver. Senior Michael Thomas and junior D.J. Thompson appear poised for big seasons, while the addition of a pair of junior college tight ends (Taylor Marini and Julian Allen) will give Todd Monken's offense an added dimension.

DEFENSE

The biggest question mark is the defensive line. Defensive tackle Rakeem Nunez-Roches left early for the NFL Draft, while Adam Williams graduated, and there wasn't much in the way of depth at that position last season.

Senior Michael Smith, who started seven games on the edge last season, has been moved inside, and the coaching staff has been impressed with sophomores Draper Riley and Rod Crayton. Junior Dylan Bradley has the potential for a monster season at end, while sophomore Xavier Thigpen has emerged as a pass-rushing specialist on the other side.

Perhaps the biggest addition on defense is linebacker D'Nerius Antoine, who brings an element of speed the Golden Eagles haven't had at that position in many years. After losing multi-year starters Jacorius Cotton and Emmanuel Johnson at safety, Southern Miss added junior college transfers Devonta Foster and Deshadrick Truly, both of whom have handled the transition to Division I very well.

Brian Anderson returns as the anchor of the defense at middle linebacker, while multi-year starter Kalan Reed and sophomore Cornell Armstrong have the inside track at corner.

> "We're at a critical point in our tenure here as a staff. This is year three, man. Now we've got to get it done."
> — Coach Todd Monken

SPECIAL TEAMS

The team faces a big loss with the graduation of kicker Corey Acosta. But there's no shortage of replacement candidates, although freshmen Parker Shaunfield and Nick Vogel (who transferred from UAB) and junior Stephen Brauchle (who transferred from Louisiana) are in a tight battle. Junior Tyler Sarrazin will likely resume punting duties this season.

OVERVIEW

Monken, in his third season at the helm of the once-proud Golden Eagle program, has said it time and again — there are no more excuses. Southern Miss was 3-9 last season after finishing 1-11 the year before. The pieces of the puzzle are in place for the Golden Eagles to turn the corner on the way back to respectability. Now, it's up to Monken and his team to make it happen.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB D'Nerius Antoine: A former safety and one-time Oklahoma State signee, Antoine will play the spur linebacker position for the Golden Eagles. Speed is his best weapon.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	9	**Nick Mullens***	6-1	196	Jr.
RB	25	**Ito Smith***	5-9	182	So.
WR	88	**Michael Thomas***	6-1	186	Sr.
WR	5	D.J. Thompson	6-3	198	Jr.
WR	83	Casey Martin	5-10	175	Sr.
TE	42	Taylor Marini	6-4	237	So.
LT	73	**Rashod Hill***	6-6	302	Sr.
LG	68	**Brandon Farmer***	6-2	308	Jr.
C	70	**Cameron Tom***	6-4	287	Jr.
RG	78	**Devin Farrior***	6-4	304	So.
RT	72	Norman Price	6-4	321	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	94	Dylan Bradley	6-1	265	Jr.
NT	9	Draper Riley	6-4	289	So.
DT	91	**Michael Smith***	6-4	277	Sr.
DE	32	Xavier Thigpen	6-5	224	So.
LB	18	**Brian Anderson***	5-10	248	Sr.
LB	16	Elijah Parker	6-2	208	Jr.
LB	12	D'Nerius Antoine	6-0	231	Jr.
CB	11	**Kalan Reed***	5-11	191	Sr.
CB	3	Cornell Armstrong	5-11	175	So.
S	15	Devonta Foster	6-0	190	Jr.
FS	8	Deshadrick Truly	6-0	190	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	93	Parker Shaunfield	6-0	162	Fr.
P	82	**Tyler Sarrazin***	6-3	204	Jr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	MISSISSIPPI STATE
Sept. 12	AUSTIN PEAY
Sept. 19	at Texas State
Sept. 26	at Nebraska
Oct. 3	NORTH TEXAS
Oct. 9	at Marshall
Oct. 17	UTSA
Oct. 24	at Charlotte
Oct. 31	UTEP
Nov. 14	at Rice
Nov. 21	OLD DOMINION
Nov. 28	at Louisiana Tech

2014 RESULTS

L	at Mississippi State	0-49
W	ALCORN STATE	26-20
L	at Alabama	12-52
W	APPALACHIAN STATE	21-20
L	RICE	23-41
L	at Middle Tennessee	31-37
W	at North Texas	30-20
L	LOUISIANA TECH	20-31
L	at UTEP	14-35
L	MARSHALL	17-63
L	at UTSA	10-12
L	UAB	24-45

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	19.0	114
Rushing	95.8	121
Passing	269.3	33
Total	365.0	97
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	35.4	109
Rushing	216.3	110
Passing	235.1	81
Total	451.4	104
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 10	- 0.8	T-112

UTSA | ROADRUNNERS

C-USA rank: 12 Record: 4-8 C-USA record: 3-5 (4th, West) Stadium: Alamodome (65,000)

RANKING 122

ROADRUNNERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: San Antonio, Texas
COACH: Larry Coker — At UTSA: 23-23, 4 years; overall: 83-38, 10 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kevin Brown
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Neal Neathery

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: None
LAST BOWL: None
RETURNING STARTERS: 6; 2 offense, 4 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Blake Bogenschutz, RB Jarveon Williams, TE David Morgan II, DE Jason Neill, LB Drew Douglas, CB Bennett Okotcha, S Mauricio Sanchez

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Williams could give the offense some punch, and Morgan was honorable mention on the all-conference team in 2014. With three starters returning, the secondary looks to lead the defense.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Roadrunners return the fewest starters in the country among FBS teams, so there are potential problems throughout the entire lineup. New faces will be spread throughout the depth chart, including the key quarterback spot.

JARVEON WILLIAMS
Photo by AP Photo/Michael Thomas

OFFENSE

UTSA will undergo a major rebuilding job on both sides of the ball, but if the spring is any indication, the offense appears to be in a slightly better position going into the season.

Quarterbacks Blake Bogenschutz and Austin Robinson have starting experience. Bogenschutz played in three games as a true freshman last season, starting one, before going out with a hand injury and getting a medical redshirt year. He was 22 of 39 passing for 282 yards. Robinson played in eight games, starting four, and was 81 of 146 for 645 yards.

Junior running back Jarveon Williams also missed time last year because of injury, but he rushed for 325 yards and caught 14 passes in eight appearances. Tight end David Morgan II is also coming off an injury that limited him to nine games (six starts). He had 20 catches for 255 yards and a touchdown.

The top returning receiver is senior Aaron Grubb, who finished with 23 receptions for 202 yards while starting three of 12 games.

Two seniors, guard William Cavanaugh (15 career starts in 25 appearances) and tackle Jordan Gray (eight starts in 28 career games) return up front, but sophomores backed up by freshmen are at center and on the left side. They have only 24 appearances among them and none as starters.

DEFENSE

Of the 22 players listed on the two-deep coming out of spring, only eight have starting experience. Of that total, three players account for 62 of the total of 79 starts.

Senior linebacker Drew Douglas heads that list with 22 starts. He was third on the team in tackles last year with 71, including seven for loss (one sack).

Senior defensive end Jason Neill, who has 10 career starts, with four coming last year, tied for the team lead in sacks last year (3.5) and is the most experienced returnee up front.

Along with senior tackles Kennedy Ubabuike and Brian Price, Neill is one of three seniors listed as starters up front going into fall camp. But junior college transfer Vontrell King-Williams is expected to compete at tackle in the fall, and JC transfer Ben Kane will challenge sophomore Marcus Davenport at end.

> "These guys have got to step forward. We've got to have a good year out of the quarterback."
>
> — Coach Larry Coker

Seniors Bennett Okotcha and Mauricio Sanchez have 40 starts between them in the secondary. Sanchez was in on 46 tackles and had one of the Roadrunners' nine interceptions. Okotcha had 23 tackles and one pick.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Sophomore Daniel Portillo, who handled some kickoffs last year, will add PATs and field goals to his duties. A redshirt freshman, walk-on Yannis Routsas, is slated to punt, with Portillo as a backup.

OVERVIEW

After injuries played such a big role in last year's disappointing finish, UTSA is in rebuilding mode. With a schedule that starts with non-conference games against Arizona, Kansas State, Oklahoma State and Colorado State, and then C-USA outings against UTEP and Louisiana Tech, the Roadrunners will find the going rough.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Vontrell King-Williams: Originally an Illinois signee who spent the 2014 season at Butler (Kan.) Community College, King-Williams (6-2, 325) is expected to see lots of time in the rotation. He was in on 39 tackles for Butler last season.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	4	Blake Bogenschutz	6-1	185	Fr.
RB	2	Jarveon Williams	5-9	195	Jr.
WR	81	Kenny Bias	6-1	180	Sr.
WR	7	Kerry Thomas Jr.	6-0	205	So.
WR	88	Aaron Grubb	5-8	170	Sr.
TE	**82**	**David Morgan II***	**6-4**	**255**	**Sr.**
LT	74	Reed Darragh	6-4	285	So.
LG	67	Kyle McKinney	6-4	305	So.
C	60	Juan Perez	6-2	280	So.
RG	**63**	**William Cavanaugh***	**6-1**	**310**	**Sr.**
RT	70	Jordan Gray	6-2	265	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	93	Marcus Davenport	6-6	220	So.
DT	90	Kennedy Ubabuike	6-2	280	Sr.
DT	91	Brian Price	6-3	305	Sr.
DE	96	Jason Neill	6-2	260	Sr.
LB	9	Marcos Curry	5-11	215	So.
LB	**32**	**Drew Douglas***	**6-1**	**225**	**Sr.**
CB	**21**	**Bennett Okotcha***	**6-0**	**185**	**Sr.**
CB	26	Trevor Baker	6-2	195	Sr.
SS	8	Michael Egwuagu	6-0	225	Jr.
SS	**25**	**Mauricio Sanchez***	**6-0**	**200**	**Sr.**
FS	11	Nate Gaines	6-2	180	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	13	Daniel Portillo	6-0	170	So.
P	39	Yannis Routsas	6-3	200	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at Arizona
Sept. 12	KANSAS STATE
Sept. 19	at Oklahoma State
Sept. 26	COLORADO STATE
Oct. 3	at UTEP
Oct. 10	LOUISIANA TECH
Oct. 17	at Southern Miss
Oct. 31	at North Texas
Nov. 7	OLD DOMINION
Nov. 14	at Charlotte
Nov. 21	RICE
Nov. 28	MIDDLE TENNESSEE

2014 RESULTS

W	at Houston	27-7
L	ARIZONA	23-26
L	at Oklahoma State	13-43
L	at FAU	37-41
L	NEW MEXICO	9-21
W	FIU	16-13
L	at Louisiana Tech	20-27
L	UTEP	0-34
L	at Rice	7-17
W	SOUTHERN MISS	12-10
L	at Western Kentucky	7-45
W	NORTH TEXAS	34-27

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	17.1	T-118
Rushing	122.2	107
Passing	175.3	108
Total	297.5	119
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.9	54
Rushing	140.2	32
Passing	229.5	65
Total	369.7	43
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 3	- 0.25	85

CHARLOTTE | 49ERS

C-USA rank: 13 | Record: 5-6 (FCS) | Stadium: Jerry Richardson Stadium (15,000)

RANKING 128

49ERS at a GLANCE

Location: Charlotte, N.C.
COACH: Brad Lambert — At Charlotte and overall: 10-12, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jeff Mullen
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Matt Wallerstedt

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: None
LAST BOWL: None
RETURNING STARTERS: 19; 9 offense; 8 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Kalif Phillips, WR Austin Duke, NG Larry Ogunjobi, LB Caleb Clayton-Molby, S Branden Dozier

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Charlotte's offense, with Phillips and Duke doing most of the damage, has been explosive against a mostly FCS schedule. The offensive line returns virtually intact, too.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The defense struggled against those same FCS opponents, allowing 31.6 points and 477.5 yards per game. Whether new coordinator Wallerstedt can fix that is Charlotte's biggest challenge.

OFFENSE

Charlotte, making its debut this season in the Football Bowl Subdivision, has an offense that could cause problems to Conference USA foes.

Running back Kalif Phillips (1,436 yards, 20 touchdowns) and receiver Austin Duke (79 catches, 1,373 yards, nine touchdowns) are dangerous from any spot on the field. Quarterback Matt Johnson, who missed the final three games of 2014 with a knee injury, is a tough competitor who is also a threat on the ground.

Depth could be a factor behind Phillips, however, with no proven backups on the roster. That's not a problem at the receiver spot, however, with Trent Bostick a capable No. 2 receiver (33 catches, 365 yards, two scores in nine games) and a group of others competing for the third spot.

Johnson, a two-year starter who has thrown for 4,522 yards and 34 career touchdowns, was competing for the starter's job in the spring with junior Lee McNeill (who played well in relief of Johnson) and redshirt freshman Brooks Barden.

Charlotte's offensive line, which returns four starters, is experienced. Left tackle Jamal Covington leads a group that allowed just 12 sacks last season.

DEFENSE

Charlotte defense was shredded last season, allowing 31.6 points and 477.5 yards per game.

Some of that was due to injuries (middle linebackers Nick Cook and Caleb Clayton-Molby were out much of the season), but new defensive coordinator Matt Wallerstedt has his work cut out.

Nose guard Larry Ogunjobi anchors the line, which will be bolstered by the additions of Devon Johnson — who missed last season with an Achilles' tendon injury — and Syracuse transfer Josh Manley.

The linebacker corps gets back Cook and Clayton-Molby, but loses Dustin Crouser and Nico Alcalde, both of whom left school and were among the team's top tacklers last season.

Karrington King, who played well when Cook and Clayton-Molby went down, had 79 tackles last season. Mark Pettit has been switched from the line and likely will start at one of the outside linebacker spots.

KALIF PHILLIPS
Photo by AP Photo/Chuck Burton

"Now we are in Conference USA, and we are ready for it."

— DB Cortezz Nixon

Safety Branden Dozier led the team in tackles (86) and, as usual, it's not good sign if a defensive back does that.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Place-kicker Blake Brewer has range, making a 51-yarder last season. Punter Arthur Hart struggled as a freshman, averaging only 36.3 yards per attempt, but he allowed only three returns all season.

OVERVIEW

The 49ers, who started football in 2013 and played as an FCS independent in their first two seasons, will take their lumps over the next few years as they adjust to life in Conference USA. Look for Charlotte's offense to keep the team in games, at least until the defense finds itself. A highlight will be a visit to Kentucky on Nov. 21, Charlotte's first game against a power-conference team.

TOP NEWCOMER

PR/KR Nate Mullen: Mullen, a true freshman, could rejuvenate a return game that was weak in 2014. Mullen, the son of offensive coordinator Jeff Mullen, is the career leader in all-purpose yards at Hickory Ridge High in Harrisburg, N.C.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	8	**Matt Johnson***	6-3	230	Jr.
RB	3	**Kalif Phillips***	5-10	205	Jr.
WR	10	**Austin Duke***	5-9	160	Jr.
WR	81	**Trent Bostick***	6-0	205	Jr.
WR	84	Juwan Foggie	6-2	190	So.
TE	15	**Justin Bolus***	6-3	220	Jr.
LT	73	**Jamal Covington***	6-4	305	Jr.
LG	68	**Danny Book***	6-6	285	Sr.
C	74	**Thomas La Bianca***	6-3	285	Jr.
RG	50	Jarred Barr	6-3	290	Jr.
RT	70	**Casey Perry***	6-2	325	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	99	**Brandon Banks***	6-3	280	Jr.
NG	65	**Larry Ogunjobi***	6-3	290	Jr.
DE	96	Devon Johnson	6-3	310	Sr.
LB	11	**Mark Pettit***	6-4	245	Jr.
LB	6	**Karrington King***	5-11	215	So.
LB	42	**Caleb Clayton-Molby***	6-2	235	Sr.
LB	24	Daquan Lucas	5-10	205	Jr.
CB	19	Devin Pearson	5-10	190	Jr.
CB	39	**Anthony Covington***	5-11	195	So.
S	8	**Ardy Holmes***	5-9	190	Sr.
S	3	**Branden Dozier***	6-0	200	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	86	**Blake Brewer***	6-1	220	Jr.
P	40	**Arthur Hart***	6-2	185	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	at Georgia State
Sept. 12	PRESBYTERIAN
Sept. 19	at Middle Tennessee
Sept. 26	FAU
Oct. 2	TEMPLE
Oct. 17	at Old Dominion
Oct. 24	SOUTHERN MISS
Oct. 31	MARSHALL
Nov. 7	at FIU
Nov. 14	UTSA
Nov. 21	at Kentucky
Nov. 28	at Rice

2014 RESULTS

W	at Campbell	33-9
W	JOHNSON C. SMITH	56-0
W	at North Carolina Central	40-28
L	at Elon	13-20
L	CHARLESTON SOUTHERN (OT)	41-47
L	at Gardner-Webb	24-27
L	at The Citadel (2OT)	56-63
L	JAMES MADISON	40-48
L	COASTAL CAROLINA	34-59
W	WESLEY COLLEGE	38-33
W	MOREHEAD STATE	52-14

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	38.8	N/A
Rushing	221.9	N/A
Passing	265.0	N/A
Total	486.9	N/A
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	31.6	N/A
Rushing	193.3	N/A
Passing	284.2	N/A
Total	477.5	N/A
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 3	- 0.27	N/A

KEEPING *the* FAITH

BY LYN SCARBROUGH

SHERRI GRAVES SMITH

Saturdays were special in Sherri Graves Smith's home.

"When I was 3 years old, my family moved from Panama City to my parents' hometown of Tuscumbia, Ala.," Sherri remembered. "Saturdays were special days when I was growing up. We watched football games as an entire family. My mother made snacks and tailgate food and we enjoyed each other's company. That togetherness made me a fan."

"Of course, living in north Alabama influenced my love of college sports. You cannot escape the big rivalry between Alabama and Auburn."

As a young girl, Sherri could not have known how her love of college sports would so profoundly impact her life as an adult. She graduated from the University of Alabama and was moving up in a successful business career.

"I was only 36 years old, an attorney with the Coca-Cola Company and I was being considered for a position in Vienna, Austria," she said. "My stomach had been bothering me, so I went to the doctor for a check-up. I was informed that I had cancer. There was no family history. I was in absolute and utter disbelief."

It was Stage IV colorectal cancer.

It was 2007 and she started with chemotherapy and radiation treatments at Atlanta Cancer Care. Her fast track career path had been slowed down. Her life had been thrown a detour.

"I had 30 days of chemo and radiation," she recalled. "I had two surgeries, including one to remove the tumor. Then, I had six months of chemo where I would infuse every two weeks at the cancer center."

While undergoing that treatment, lifelong friend, Chuck Smith, was one of her primary caregivers. That relationship blossomed and they were married one year to the day after her cancer diagnosis. After a honeymoon, Sherri went back to her job, but shortly after returning, she found out that the cancer had spread to both lungs. Even more severe treatment started.

"I went to the center every two weeks and wore a chemo pump for 46 hours," she said. "That was too difficult. I would end up in the emergency room or hospital each time that I had chemo, so the doctor changed the regimen — chemo every Monday and chemo pills for four days. I did that for a little over four years."

It was during that time when Sherri's love for college football impacted her new life in a way that she could never have imagined. And, it was a horrible, illegal act that made it happen.

Auburn is Alabama's biggest rival and those teams usually compete for conference and national titles. Rolling Toomer's Corner, the throwing of toilet paper into tall oaks in the center of town, is an Auburn tradition after significant wins. The Tigers defeated the Crimson Tide in 2010 and were national champions. One renegade Bama fan didn't take that well. He administered a lethal dose of poison to the ancient trees.

"I was mortified and embarrassed," Sherri said. "When I was a little girl, my father talked to me about being dignified, handling disappointments with class, and taking the high road. So when the poisoning happened, I was disappointed and hurt.

"I was a few years into treatments for Stage IV cancer then, fighting for my life on a daily basis. That deeply impacted the way I look at things. Traditions and memories are important. Life is fleeting and moments should be cherished.

"I was disturbed about the example it set for children. I wanted to find a way to teach good sportsmanship and manners without being heavy-handed. So, I thought about what if a team mascot takes a child on a game day and teaches those things."

Sherri decided to produce children's books with that theme, starting with Alabama, Auburn, Georgia and Georgia Tech.

"Absolutely not, I didn't expect what happened next," she admitted. "People started asking for books for more schools. I now have over 50 schools, two Major League Baseball teams, and the Dallas Mavericks. I've also started an alphabet and counting series where I've taken football facts and school traditions, and made them rhyme."

Her books are available nationally and her work is acclaimed. She has been active in fundraising for cancer research and in 2013 received the Survivor's Circle Award from the American Cancer Society of Radiation Oncology for her work in the cancer community.

Despite how her business has exploded, her original goals with the project were simple.

"I was in my third year of treatment and wanted to do something positive with my life," she explained. "More than anything, I wanted to make a child learn positive messages and have fun in the process.

"My parents read to me as a child every night. I saw a woman on television reading one of my books to her child, and I welled up with tears. The thought that people are reading to the children and building memories gives me such joy. I hope that the lessons help them now, but will also stay with them as adults."

Sherri gives much credit for her success to her husband, parents and other family members.

"My husband helps me emotionally and physically," she said. "It has been hard going through things like losing my hair and not being able to do simple things, but he remains faithful."

Sherri's parents, married for 56 years, have been her example. Her father, an 88-year old retired Air Force veteran, still owns two funeral homes and has a Sunday morning radio show where he plays gospel music, gives funeral announcements, and even teaches Sunday School if bad weather makes church attendance difficult for the audience.

"I don't remember a time when prayer and Christ were not a part of my upbringing," she said. "It wasn't just going to church or Bible class. Lessons were instilled about being of service, knowing Scriptures and having respect and reverence for God. We prayed together as a family. Living in a Christ-centered household was, and still is, very important.

"I know that for all intents and purposes, I should not still be here. There were times that I have gone to sleep sure that I was going to pass on and I was surprised when I awakened. So many people have been praying for me and I have placed my faith in Him to carry me through."

To find out more about Sherri Graves Smith's books, go to www.gamedayrules.com.

Sherri and Chuck Smith with the first two books.

PICKING THE MAC

Bowling Green Heads to Top of Class in Crowded MAC

Western Michigan and Toledo put 11 players each on the All-MAC teams last season, a sign the league is catching up with Northern Illinois and perhaps another indication the league is still top-heavy.

The candidates to wear the crown in 2015 might not be blatantly obvious, but it's as clear as the Glass Bowl where the talent lies.

Western Michigan found a new motor in 2014 in Freshman of the Year running back Jarvion Franklin, also the Offensive Player of the Year, and the Broncos are brimming with first-team type skill talent.

That might not be enough.

Coach P.J. Fleck knows all too well the championship chops of Northern Illinois — the WMU coach was a productive receiver for the Huskies in his glory days — and that the league tends to throw surprises atop the standings as an annual fall rite.

Multiple teams could claim the MAC title.

We'll go with Bowling Green.

Bowling Green's offense is in very good hands. Coach Dino Babers will be able to crank up the tempo in the "Falcon Fast" offense, with the return from injury of quarterback Matt Johnson, who comes back to the field surrounded by a veteran cast.

When last at full health, Johnson was guiding the Falcons to the 2013 MAC championship, throwing for 3,467 yards and 25 touchdowns along the way. And, if he is felled by injury this season, Bowling Green will be comfortable with sophomore James Knapke, not a bad backup to have on the sideline. He helped direct BG to eight victories last season.

Throw in running back Travis Greene and emerging Fred Coppet — and the team's top four receivers — and, yeah, the Falcons are going to blow past last year's average of 30.0 points per game.

Meanwhile, Northern Illinois has an exciting backfield and solid defense, and the Huskies remain the class of the West. Until further notice, they are the division favorite.

Overall, though, Toledo, Central Michigan and Ohio could be right in the thick of the championship chase, too. And is anybody ready to totally dismiss Western Michigan, with Jarvion Franklin and quarterback Zach Terrell, the sixth-most efficient quarterback in the country last season?

See. It could be a wild race just based off those teams.

Of course, that's not all.

In the MAC, there's at least one contender coming off the edge you usually don't see coming.

CONFERENCE PICKS

EAST DIVISION	Good news	Bad news	Our call
1. Bowling Green	Quarterback Matt Johnson (hip) returns with eight other starters on offense.	The team's shaky 'D' was torched last season, gutted up the middle.	The offense can — and might need to be — special enough to win the title.
2. Ohio	Coach Frank Solich is sure he has foundation for a stronger offense.	Mix of newcomers, thin front seven could spell defensive problems.	Favorable schedule and uptick in athleticism equals East contender.
3. Buffalo	Bulls are rich in experience at key spots, including quarterback, running back.	The defense is shifting to a 4-3, and the cupboard is nearly bare.	New coach Lance Leipold (109-6 in Division III) will make it exciting, win or lose.
4. Kent State	Improved offense and good health enough to spark a turnaround.	Just 1-6 in the MAC last season; is a massive jump realistic?	The draw is favorable for the Flashes after early non-conference meetings.
5. Akron	Defense was tops in MAC in points allowed in 2014; QB should be back.	Terry Bowden likes his options, but quarterback wasn't set exiting spring.	There is enough potential to believe a push is possible in uneven East.
6. UMass	Heading the right direction, even if the depth is suspect.	Too many fixes. Only woeful EMU gave up more points in the MAC last season.	"Wait 'til next year" could be realistic refrain.
7. Miami (Ohio)	The RedHawks return eight starters on defense.	Miami has a weak offensive line and is unproven all around on offense.	RedHawks lost seven games by 10 points or less in 2014. If half of those bounce their way in 2015 ...
WEST DIVISION			
1. Northern Illinois	QB Hare no tortoise, and defense could be MAC's best on back end.	Absent bell-cow back and with rough early schedule, do growing pains leave a mark?	With depth at wide receiver, the Huskies grind early and rise late.
2. Toledo	All-MAC running back Kareem Hunt is star of league's best offense.	Does scheme work after loss of three top OL? Unproven pass defense remains weak.	Rockets sneak into contention with better play in secondary.
3. Central Michigan	QB Cooper Rush (seven TDs in bowl game) has stout defense to rely on.	All new skill position crew, and raw LB corps must hit the ground running ... or else.	The middle of the 4-2-5 catches on and CMU flexes muscle on both sides of the ball.
4. Western Michigan	This TKO offense has elite potential, threats everywhere.	Middle of the defense is a concern. No league title since 1988.	Highly experienced and uber-talented; could emerge as class of the MAC.
5. Ball State	Very talented receiver group and offensive line, other spots are suspect.	Is there a player the offense can lean on when it matters?	Always a matter of running with NIU, Toledo. Ball State not there yet.
6. Eastern Michigan	Second season under coach Chris Creighton sets system.	Steep hill to climb, especially in this league given holes on OL, secondary.	New faces can help, but needle reading remains sink-and-surge.

Lindy's 2015 ALL-MAC TEAM

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Zach Terrell	Jr.	Western Michigan
RB	Jarvion Franklin	So.	Western Michigan
RB	Kareem Hunt	Jr.	Toledo
WR	Corey Davis	Jr.	Western Michigan
WR	Roger Lewis	So.	Bowling Green
TE	Rodney Mills	Sr.	UMass
C	Andrew Ness	Sr.	Northern Illinois
OL	Alex Huettel	Sr.	Bowling Green
OL	Willie Beavers	Sr.	Western Michigan
OL	James Kristof	Sr.	Western Michigan
OL	Lucas Powell	Sr.	Ohio
AP	Ryan Burbrink	Sr.	Bowling Green
K	Tyler Tate	Sr.	Bowling Green

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	Pat O'Connor	Sr.	Eastern Michigan
DL	Cody Grice	Sr.	Akron
DL	Orion Jones	Sr.	Toledo
DL	Treyvon Hester	Sr.	Toledo
LB	Jatavis Brown	Sr.	Akron
LB	Jovan Santos-Knox	Sr.	UMass
LB	Boomer Mays	Sr.	Northern Illinois
DB	Nate Holley	Jr.	Kent State
DB	Paris Logan	Sr.	Northern Illinois
DB	Nick Johnson	So.	Bowling Green
DB	Randall Jette	Sr.	UMass
P	Anthony Melchiori	Sr.	Kent State

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Blake Frohnapfel	Sr.	UMass
RB	Travis Greene	Sr.	Bowling Green
RB	Anthone Taylor	Sr.	Buffalo
WR	Tajae Sharpe	Sr.	UMass
WR	Jordan Williams	Sr.	Ball State
TE	Matt Weiser	Sr.	Buffalo
C	Nick Beamish	Sr.	Central Michigan
OL	Jake Richard	Sr.	Ball State
OL	Aidan Conlon	Sr.	Northern Illinois
OL	Storm Norton	Jr.	Toledo
OL	Mike Lucas	Sr.	Ohio
AP	Fred McRae	Jr.	Ball State
K	Andrew Haldeman	Sr.	Western Michigan

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Tarell Basham	Sr.	Ohio
DL	Joe Ostman	Sr.	Central Michigan
DL	Darnell Smith	Sr.	Ball State
DL	Perez Ford	Sr.	Northern Illinois
LB	Great Ibe	Sr.	Eastern Michigan
LB	Jovon Johnson	Sr.	Ohio
LB	Rasheen Lemon	Sr.	Northern Illinois
DB	Tony Annese	Jr.	Central Michigan
DB	Ronald Zamort	Sr.	Western Michigan
DB	Deontae Brown	So.	Western Michigan
DB	Chaz Whittaker	Sr.	Toledo
P	J. Schroeder	Jr.	Western Michigan

THE BIG ONES

Sept. 4	Kent State at Illinois
Sept. 5	Bowling Green vs. Tennessee (Nashville)
Sept. 19	Iowa State at Toledo
Sept. 26	Bowling Green at Purdue
Sept. 26	Ohio at Minnesota
Oct. 3	Northern Illinois at Central Michigan
Oct. 10	Central Michigan at Western Michigan
Oct. 17	Western Michigan at Ohio
Nov. 3	Northern Illinois at Toledo
Nov. 4	Ohio at Bowling Green
Nov. 10	Toledo at Central Michigan
Nov. 11	Bowling Green at Western Michigan
Nov. 18	Western Michigan at Northern Illinois
Nov. 24	Ohio at Northern Illinois

BOWL CONNECTIONS

MAC Champion
Boca Raton Bowl vs. AAC

MAC #2
GoDaddy Bowl vs. Sun Belt

MAC #3
Famous Idaho Potato Bowl vs. MW

Non-guaranteed

MAC #4
Popeye's Bahamas Bowl vs. CUSA

MAC #5
Camellia Bowl vs. Sun Belt

TOP 10 NFL TALENT

1. Corey Davis	WR	Jr.	Western Michigan	Smooth with 21 TDs in first two seasons.
2. Jarvion Franklin	RB	So.	Western Michigan	Big at 6-1, 220; has slash speed, power.
3. Kareem Hunt	RB	Jr.	Toledo	Runner-returner skills for NFL, 151 ypg in '14.
4. Tajae Sharpe	WR	Sr.	UMass	At 6-4, 205, has matchup edge at any level.
5. Orion Jones	DT	Sr.	Toledo	Pass-rushing interior defensive lineman.
6. Jatavis Brown	OLB	Sr.	Akron	Likely three-time All-MAC, skills will transfer.
7. Paris Logan	CB	Sr.	Northern Illinois	Cover man with return experience.
8. Anthony Melchiori	P	Sr.	Kent State	Good leg with kickoff ability.
9. Andrew Ness	C	Sr.	Northern Illinois	Swift pivot for a strong running game, OG potential.
10. Jovan Santos-Knox	LB	Sr.	UMass	Old-school thumper had 143 tackles last season.

*Only draft-eligible players included.

Most Valuable Player	Offensive Player of the Year	Defensive Player of the Year	Newcomer of the Year
Kareem Hunt, RB, Toledo	Jarvion Franklin RB, Western Michigan	Jatavis Brown, LB, Akron	Jamal Marcus, DE, Akron

HONOR ROLL

Most accurate passer	Zach Terrell	Western Michigan
Strongest arm	Kyle Pohl	Akron
Best scrambler	Drew Hare	Northern Illinois
Coolest in the clutch	Zach Terrell	Western Michigan
Toughest to bring down	Jarvion Franklin	Western Michigan
Best hands	Tajae Sharpe	UMass
Most dangerous deep threat	Corey Davis	Western Michigan
Best run blocker	Andrew Ness	Northern Illinois
Best pass blocker	Willie Beavers	Western Michigan
Best cover corner	Paris Logan	Northern Illinois
Best pass rusher	Orion Jones	Toledo
Special teams demon	Matt Mills	Central Michigan

BOWLING GREEN | FALCONS

MAC rank: 1 Record: 8-6 MAC record: 5-3 (1st, East) Stadium: Perry Stadium (24,000)

RANKING 45

FALCONS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Bowling Green, Ohio
COACH: Dino Babers — At Bowling Green: 8-6, 1 year; overall: 27-13, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Mike Lynch, Sean Lewis
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brian Ward

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2013
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2011
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 9 offense, 2 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Matt Johnson, QB James Knapke, RB Travis Greene, WR Roger Lewis, OL Alex Huettel, DT Zach Colvin, LB Trenton Greene, CB Clint Stephens

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Nearly every starter is back on offense, plus Johnson is healthy after missing all but one game last season. The execution and the crispness of the "Falcon Fast" offense was vastly improved in the spring, and there's the potential of some additional talent with some BCS transfers expected to contribute.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Falcons have some glaring holes on defense, particularly at linebacker. A batch of new assistants, most notably a new defensive and offensive coordinator, is cause for concern. CB Nick Johnson, who had five interceptions as a freshman last season, was suspended indefinitely in April because of legal issues.

ROGER LEWIS
Photo by Marvin Gentry-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

In Dino Babers' first year, Bowling Green lost starting quarterback Matt Johnson after the first game of the season. The "Falcon Fast" offense immediately hit a snag, both in timing and execution.

With Johnson fully recovered from his hip injury, plus the return of nine starters, the Falcons' offense is set to turn it up a notch. Johnson, who passed for 3,467 yards and 25 touchdowns in leading the Falcons to the MAC championship in 2013, gained a better grasp of the offense while on the sidelines last season.

Sophomore quarterback James Knapke is one of the most experienced backups in the conference. He guided the Falcons to eight wins, including a bowl victory. Travis Greene and Fred Coppet headline a talented batch of running backs, while the top four receivers return.

Roger Lewis caught 73 passes for 1,093 yards, and Ryan Burbrink added 64 receptions for 758 yards. The return of Chris Gallon, who sat out nearly two seasons, and the addition of Baylor transfer Robbie Rhodes bolster the depth at receiver.

The offensive line, with four starters back, should be one of the best in the conference.

DEFENSE

Brian Ward is the second defensive coordinator in as many years. Change is definitely the theme after the Falcons allowed 33.5 points and 493.6 yards per game in 2014.

The Falcons' Cover-2 scheme was openly endorsed by most of the players, with an emphasis by the coaching staff for big corners and safeties.

Defensive tackle Zach Colvin returns from an injury that sidelined him for the season following the opener. The Falcons have a handful of playmakers at defensive end. Senior Bryan Thomas had eight sacks last season, while Tennessee transfer Malik Brown is also slated to help out at end after playing sparingly last season.

Bowling Green will miss linebacker Gabe Martin, strong safety Brian Sutton and cornerback Jude Adjei-Barimah. Inexperience is a problem at linebacker and in the secondary, where freshmen and sophomores could vie for starting time.

> "Their offense has the potential to be unstoppable, especially if Johnson can apply what he learned sitting out and is healthy."
>
> — Rival MAC assistant coach

SPECIAL TEAMS

Babers said Tyler Tate (23 of 29 field goal attempts, long of 52 last season) has the potential to be an NFL kicker. He calls punter Joe Davidson, who averaged 42.6 yards per attempt last season, an elite athlete.

Competition to be the punt and kick returners should aid both spots. Burbrink averaged 9.8 yards per punt return. Ronnie Moore is projected to handle the kick returns.

OVERVIEW

A healthy Johnson piloting the offense will make the Falcons tough to outscore and might offset the questions on defense. Babers is attracting recruits, and the program has the talent to win the East Division for the third season in a row. The non-conference schedule is a bear with games at Tennessee, Maryland and Purdue, but that could just help Bowling Green prepare to win its second MAC title in three seasons.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Robbie Rhodes: A transfer from Baylor, Rhodes is part of a crowded and talented group of receivers. He caught 10 passes for 157 yards as a true freshman with the Bears.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	11	Matt Johnson	6-0	221	Sr.
RB	8	**Travis Greene***	5-10	183	Sr.
WR	17	**Ryan Burbrink***	5-8	183	Sr.
WR	4	**Gehrig Dieter***	6-3	204	Jr.
WR	1	**Roger Lewis***	6-0	196	So.
WR	5	**Ronnie Moore***	5-9	168	Jr.
LT	67	**Jacob Bennett***	6-5	332	Jr.
LG	68	Ryan Hunter	6-4	324	So.
C	71	**Tim McAuliffe***	6-0	274	So.
RG	55	**Alex Huettel***	6-4	309	Sr.
RT	53	**Logan Dietz ***	6-6	298	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	43	**Bryan Thomas***	6-3	248	Sr.
DT	92	Zach Colvin	6-3	287	Sr.
NT	54	Mike Minns	5-10	313	Jr.
DE	61	Terrance Bush	6-2	238	Jr.
LB	16	Austin Valdez	6-0	226	Fr.
LB	27	Nate Locke	6-0	227	Fr.
LB	20	Trenton Greene	5-9	195	Sr.
CB	1	**Darrell Hunter II***	5-9	178	Sr.
CB	2	Clint Stephens	5-10	180	So.
S	36	Jack Walz III	5-10	190	Fr.
S	18	Dernard Turner	6-0	189	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	98	**Tyler Tate***	6-0	185	Sr.
P	49	**Joseph Davidson***	6-7	220	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	vs. Tennessee (Nashville)
Sept. 12	at Maryland
Sept. 19	MEMPHIS
Sept. 26	at Purdue
Oct. 3	at Buffalo
Oct. 10	MASSACHUSETTS
Oct. 17	AKRON
Oct. 24	at Kent State
Nov. 4	OHIO
Nov. 11	at Western Michigan
Nov. 17	TOLEDO
Nov. 24	at Ball State

2014 RESULTS

L	WESTERN KENTUCKY	31-59
W	VMI	48-7
W	INDIANA	45-42
L	at Wisconsin	17-68
W	at Massachusetts	47-42
W	BUFFALO	36-35
W	at Ohio	31-13
L	WESTERN MICHIGAN	14-26
W	at Akron	27-10
W	KENT STATE	30-20
L	at Toledo	20-27
L	BALL STATE	24-41
	MAC Championship Game	
L	vs. Northern Illinois	17-51
	Camellia Bowl	
W	vs. South Alabama	33-28

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	30.0	56
Rushing	173.0	54
Passing	259.9	40
Total	432.9	41
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	33.5	106
Rushing	202.1	99
Passing	291.4	122
Total	493.6	115
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 10	+ 0.71	17

NORTHERN ILLINOIS | HUSKIES

MAC rank: 2 Record: 11-3 MAC record: 7-1 (T-1st, West) Stadium: Huskie Stadium (30,076)

RANKING 51

HUSKIES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: DeKalb, Ill.
COACH: Rod Carey: At Northern Illinois and overall: 23-6, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Bob Cole
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jay Niemann

RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 5 offense, 7 defense
LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2007

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Drew Hare, RB Joel Bouagnon, WR Tommylee Lewis, WR Juwan Brescacin, DE Perez Ford, LB Boomer Mays, CB Paris Logan, SS Marlon Moore

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Hare is the clear-cut starter and the confidence from another off-season in the system is a plus. Playmakers are everywhere on offense, including potentially six to eight receivers who can make a difference. The secondary is experienced, while the defense brings back seven starters.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Huskies have to find three new starters on the offensive line and have to fill holes at fullback and tight end. Will the running back-by-committee work? The Huskies might struggle getting production from their defensive ends.

DREW HARE
Photo by Mike DiNovo-USA TODAY Sports

"They keep winning and reloading each year. NIU's program is like a machine."
— Rival MAC head coach

OFFENSE

Drew Hare emerged as the clear-cut starter at quarterback during a Week 2 upset at Northwestern.

Hare, a junior, started the final 11 games, putting up respectable numbers and staying away from making careless mistakes. Hare quickly put away any lingering concerns of finding a replacement for 2013 Heisman Trophy finalist Jordan Lynch. Hare passed for 2,322 yards and 18 touchdowns, while tossing just two interceptions and running for 900 yards and eight touchdowns.

Although he doesn't possess the talents of Chandler Harnish or Lynch, Hare took major strides last season.

Third-year coach Rod Carey's preference for using a three-man rotation at running back will continue after the Huskies lost leading rusher Cameron Stingily and Akeem Daniels. Joel Bouagnon, Jordan Huff, Keith Harris Jr. and Draco Smith are vying for carries in a crowded backfield. It's not necessarily needed, but perhaps one can be a breakout runner.

Despite losing Da'Ron Brown, who caught a team-high 68 receptions for 1,065 yards, the Huskies won't experience a drop-off at wide receiver.

If anything, the Huskies might improve because of an influx of talented receivers, led by Juwan Brescacin, Tommylee Lewis, Chad Beebe, Aregeros Turner, North Dakota transfer Kenny Golladay and incoming freshman Spencer Tears.

Senior center Andrew Ness and senior left guard Aidan Conlon must lead a young offensive line.

DEFENSE

Seven starters return from a unit that ranked high in the major defensive categories in conference play. The secondary is deep and experienced after enduring some rough spots early last season.

The secondary will miss Dechane Durante, but safety Marlon Moore led the Huskies with 99 tackles last season and Paris Logan and Anthony Brooks are an experienced tandem.

At linebacker, Rasheen Lemon is an aggressive and physical hitter, and Boomer Mays is a potential all-conference player. There's one open starting spot at linebacker, but there's no shortage of quality candidates.

Although end and sack specialist Jason Meehan is going to be hard to replace, the defensive line is more experienced than in past years. Defensive end Perez Ford is primed for another big season.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Christian Hagan helped stabilize the offense after taking over the field-goal duties late in his freshman season. The Huskies sorely missed the injured Lewis in the return game last season. Freshman Peter Deppe is slated to handle the punting duties.

OVERVIEW

The Huskies have captured five straight MAC West Division titles, even earning a BCS Bowl berth in the Orange Bowl against Florida State in January 2013. Northern Illinois, though, has lost three straight bowl games, plus was blown out in the MAC title game in 2013.

Once again, Carey has stressed the importance of NIU winning its last game — in this case a bowl game. Besides playing at Ohio State, the Huskies won't be bogged down by their schedule and will make another strong run at a MAC title.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Kenny Golladay: The North Dakota transfer impressed the coaching staff in the spring and will be a key part of the rotation. Golladay (6-4, 200) caught 69 passes for 884 yards and eight TDs in his sophomore season at North Dakota.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	12	**Drew Hare***	6-1	210	Jr.
RB	28	**Joel Bouagnon***	6-2	224	Jr.
FB	35	Shane Wimann	6-4	249	So.
WR	11	**Juwan Brescacin***	6-4	228	Sr.
WR	10	Tommylee Lewis	5-7	159	Sr.
TE	37	Desroy Maxwell	6-2	259	Sr.
LT	71	Levon Myers	6-5	299	Jr.
LG	61	**Aidan Conlon***	6-3	301	Sr.
C	55	**Andrew Ness***	6-3	298	Sr.
RG	70	Josh Ruka	6-5	305	Jr.
RT	74	Lincoln Howard	6-5	301	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	54	Cameron Clinton-Earl	6-1	253	Sr.
DT	90	**William Lee***	6-2	303	So.
DT	56	Ben Compton	6-4	263	Sr.
DE	44	**Perez Ford***	6-0	223	Sr.
LB	9	**Rasheen Lemon***	6-0	220	Sr.
LB	45	**Boomer Mays***	6-0	246	Sr.
LB	40	Sean Folliard	6-2	229	Jr.
CB	31	**Anthony Brooks***	5-11	191	Jr.
CB	29	**Paris Logan***	5-9	189	Sr.
SS	2	**Marlon Moore***	5-9	195	Sr.
FS	24	Brandon Mayes	5-11	188	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	34	Christian Hagan	6-0	180	So.
P	18	Peter Deppe	6-1	198	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	UNLV
Sept. 12	MURRAY STATE
Sept. 19	at Ohio State
Sept. 26	at Boston College
Oct. 3	at Central Michigan
Oct. 10	BALL STATE
Oct. 17	at Miami (OH)
Oct. 24	EASTERN MICHIGAN
Nov. 3	at Toledo
Nov. 11	at Buffalo
Nov. 18	WESTERN MICHIGAN
Nov. 24	OHIO

2014 RESULTS

W	PRESBYTERIAN	55-3
W	at Northwestern	23-15
W	at UNLV	48-34
L	at Arkansas	14-52
W	KENT STATE	17-14
L	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	17-34
W	MIAMI (OH)	51-41
W	at Eastern Michigan	28-17
W	at Ball State	35-21
W	TOLEDO	27-24
W	at Ohio	21-14
W	at Western Michigan	31-21
	MAC Championship Game	
W	vs. Bowling Green	51-17
	Boca Raton Bowl	
L	vs. Marshall	23-52

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	31.5	47
Rushing	249.1	16
Passing	192.1	97
Total	441.2	36
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.6	51
Rushing	163.1	58
Passing	228.5	63
Total	391.6	57
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 12	+ 0.86	T-9

TOLEDO | ROCKETS

MAC rank: 3 Record: 9-4 MAC record: 7-1 (T-1st, West) Stadium: Glass Bowl (26,248)

RANKING 72

ROCKETS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Toledo, Ohio
COACH: Matt Campbell — At Toledo and overall: 26-13, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jason Candle
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jon Heacock

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2004
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 5 offense, 8 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Kareem Hunt, WR Alonzo Russell, WR Corey Jones, DT Treyvon Hester, DT Orion Jones, DE Trent Voss, CB Cheatham Norrils, S Chaz Whittaker

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: With a pair of proven starting quarterbacks, an all-conference tailback, and explosive talent at wide receiver, Toledo has the weapons to exploit opposing defenses. The Rocket defense is now stocked deep with experience along the line and in the secondary after injuries in those units last season forced a lot of young players onto the field.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: That all-senior dominant offensive line of 2014 paid huge dividends, but now the Rockets start over up front. The place-kicking job is another huge wild card, since three-time All-MAC pick Jeremiah Detmer has graduated, and the punting could be improved, too.

KAREEM HUNT
Photo by John David Mercer-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Toledo, which had the most productive offense in the Mid-American Conference last season, returns a wealth of talent at the skill positions, but must replace its entire offensive front, including three all-league linemen.

There is depth and proven skill at quarterback, where injuries last season allowed junior Logan Woodside and senior Phillip Ely to work as starters. The duo sat out the spring to heal, allowing sophomore Michael Julian to demonstrate he is a very capable third option.

Tailback Kareem Hunt, first team all-conference last season when he rushed for 1,631 yards, could be the league's best back. He had 271 rushing yards and five touchdowns in Toledo's GoDaddy Bowl win.

All-MAC senior receiver Alonzo Russell has grabbed 56, 59 and 51 passes, respectively, in the past three seasons. Junior Corey Jones is explosive in the slot, with 68 catches for 842 yards last year.

On the line, some of the bit-part players of the past, such as Storm Norton and Mike Ebert, must quickly forge a new and reliable front.

DEFENSE

The Rockets are deeper and more skilled on defense than in recent years. Coach Matt Campbell is convinced the pieces are there to craft a stout unit, so he doesn't have to rely as much on his offense to simply outscore everybody.

Toledo has struggled to defend the pass, but a secondary decimated by injuries in the past is now bolstered by waves of healthy and experienced performers.

There are, in a sense, four returning starters at the corners — two from last season, and a duo from 2013 that missed a year ago. Senior Cheatham Norrils leads the group and has all-conference-caliber skills.

At safety, there are five players with significant experience, led by senior hitter Chaz Whittaker. Add UAB transfer Rolan Milligan to the mix, and the Rockets have lots of options.

Nine experienced players return on the defensive front, including All-MAC tackles Treyvon Hester and Orion Jones. End Trent Voss is another playmaker with all-conference talent. Marquise Moore, a former champion wrestler, comes back from an injury and fits into what should be a busy rotation up front.

The linebackers are the least experienced group, with senior Chase Murdock the leader in both skill and resume.

> **"We've made a lot of strides, but the challenge for the offensive line now is, how fast can they grow as players?"**
> **— Matt Campbell**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Uncertainty looms as the Rockets look to replace three-time All-MAC kicker Jeremiah Detmer. Sophomore Sam Vucelich has to fend off several walk-ons to secure the job. Nick Ellis returns as the punter, having averaged just 36.6 yards per attempt last season.

OVERVIEW

The comforts of home need to mean a lot for the Rockets, who will enjoy seven games at the Glass Bowl this season as they break in an all-new offensive line. The experience, depth and quality of players elsewhere on the roster is solid, and the offense has explosive performers at the skill positions, but Toledo probably only goes as far as that unproven offensive line allows.

TOP NEWCOMER

OL Ruben Carter: Toledo gets help where it is most needed by adding Carter, a graduate transfer from Florida State. In his final season of eligibility, he could push his way into the starting lineup with a strong fall camp.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	12	**Phillip Ely***	6-1	202	Sr.
RB	3	**Kareem Hunt***	5-11	215	Jr.
WR	9	**Alonzo Russell***	6-4	205	Sr.
WR	4	**Corey Jones***	5-8	165	Jr.
WR	25	Cody Thompson	6-1	187	So.
TE	15	**Alex Zmolik***	6-5	245	Sr.
LT	74	Storm Norton	6-8	310	Jr.
LG	53	Bill Weber	6-4	325	So.
C	76	Elijah Nkansah	6-6	295	So.
RG	68	Paul Perschon	6-6	310	Jr.
RT	89	Mike Ebert	6-6	285	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	99	**Allen Covington***	6-2	275	Sr.
DT	91	**Treyvon Hester***	6-4	300	Jr.
DT	97	**Orion Jones***	6-2	285	Sr.
DE	43	**Trent Voss***	6-3	220	Sr.
LB	44	Jaylen Coleman	6-0	235	Jr.
LB	40	**Chase Murdock***	6-0	225	Sr.
LB	31	Zach Quinn	6-3	225	So.
CB	2	**Jordan Martin***	6-2	205	Jr.
CB	11	**Cheatham Norrils***	6-0	195	Sr.
S	8	**Chaz Whittaker***	6-2	200	Sr.
S	23	DeJuan Rogers	6-1	185	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	39	Sam Vucelich	5-11	172	So.
P	48	**Nick Ellis***	5-11	170	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	STONY BROOK
Sept. 12	at Arkansas
Sept. 19	IOWA STATE
Sept. 26	ARKANSAS STATE
Oct. 3	at Ball State
Oct. 10	KENT STATE
Oct. 17	EASTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 24	at Massachusetts
Nov. 3	NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Nov. 10	at Central Michigan
Nov. 17	at Bowling Green
Nov. 27	WESTERN MICHIGAN

2014 RESULTS

W	NEW HAMPSHIRE	54-20
L	MISSOURI	24-49
L	at Cincinnati	34-58
W	BALL STATE	34-23
W	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	42-28
W	at Western Michigan (OT)	20-19
L	at Iowa State	30-37
W	MASSACHUSETTS	42-35
W	at Kent State	30-20
L	at Northern Illinois	24-27
W	BOWLING GREEN	27-20
W	at Eastern Michigan	52-16
	GoDaddy Bowl	
W	vs. Arkansas State	63-44

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	36.6	19
Rushing	256.4	12
Passing	234.2	59
Total	490.5	15
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	30.5	T-90
Rushing	116.2	14
Passing	291.7	123
Total	407.9	T-76
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 3	- 0.23	T-81

CENTRAL MICHIGAN | CHIPPEWAS

MAC rank: 4 Record: 7-6 MAC record: 5-3 (4th, West) Stadium: Kelly/Shorts Stadium (30,255)

RANKING 89

CHIPPEWAS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Mount Pleasant, Mich.
COACH: John Bonamego: At Central Michigan and overall: 1st year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Morris Watts
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Greg Colby

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2009
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 5 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Cooper Rush, RB Devon Spalding, RB Saylor Lavallii, WR Jesse Kroll, DL Joe Ostman, DL Blake Serpa, S Tony Annese, S Kavon Frazier

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Rush is heading into his third year as the starting quarterback. He started as a redshirt freshman but made great strides last season as a sophomore, capping off the year with a 28-for-45 performance in the Bahamas Bowl, throwing for 493 yards and seven TDs. He's always been a gifted thrower; now he has the experience to be a gifted quarterback.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: WR Titus Davis and RB Thomas Rawls were some of the best playmakers in the conference, and their departure leaves sizeable voids. Spalding earned time in the backfield as a true freshman last year, while Kroll proved to be an admirable possession receiver. Can they be "the guy?" CMU also needs to find a replacement at linebacker for tackling machine Justin Cherocci, who graduated.

COOPER RUSH
Photo by Steve Beyer

"We want to be fast and take advantage of every minute, every second that we have out there."

— John Bonamego

OFFENSE

Cooper Rush had one of the most prolific passing days in NCAA history during the Bahamas Bowl, tying the record for touchdown passes in a game with seven. He completed 28 of 45 passes for 493 yards, nearly leading Central Michigan back from a 35-point deficit before losing by a point going for two.

Rush is back. His best playmakers are not.

That includes Titus Davis, the only wide receiver in NCAA history to record at least eight touchdown receptions in four different seasons; he left holding school records for career touchdown receptions (37) and receiving yards (3,705). Former Michigan transfer Thomas Rawls, who set the nation on fire through the first six weeks of the season is gone, too.

Jesse Kroll was a possession receiver last year, but he returns as the most experienced pass catcher.

Saylor Lavallii has been a consistent contributor and spot starter in the backfield over the last three seasons, and Devon Spalding earned more time as his freshman season went along last year, even earning a couple starts.

CMU returns three starters along the line, including one of the nation's best centers in Nick Beamish, who will be a four-year starter. Connor Collins started as a redshirt freshman before losing his job to Kenny Rogers last season. He has a chance to move into the left guard spot vacated by longtime standout Andy Phillips.

DEFENSE

Defensive ends Joe Ostman and Blake Serpa and tackle Jabari Dean return as starters from a defense that was the top-ranked group in the MAC. Louis Palmer, Kelby Latta and Shafer Johnson all return with experience, as well.

The same can be said for the secondary, where starter Tony Annese returns at safety, along with cornerback Brandon Greer. Annese was a third-team All-MAC selection last season. He tied Greer for the team lead with three interceptions, in addition to his 74 tackles, which ranked second on the squad.

Safety Kavon Frazier has some starting experience, as well.

The weakness comes in the linebacker corps where both starters graduated. CMU relied on its linebackers to be volume tacklers in the 4-2-5 system under former coach Dan Enos.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Brian Eavey, punter Ron Coluzzi and long-snapper Mike Zenk are all returning. Eavey was 8 of 9 on field goal attempts as a redshirt freshman last season, with a long of 43 yards. Coluzzi averaged 37.6 yards a punt.

OVERVIEW

The Chippewas have some nice pieces, but much will depend on how quickly they can adapt to new coach John Bonamego's systems, and the learning curve is steep with Oklahoma State coming to Mount Pleasant for the season opener. The non-conference schedule also features Syracuse and Michigan State. The transition was made smoother because Bonamego, a long-time NFL assistant, retained most of the previous staff, but it's hard to know what to expect in his first head-coaching job.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB Malik Fountain: The redshirt freshman had a strong spring, capped by an interception in the spring game. The Chippewas are in need of play-making linebackers, and Fountain had 32 career tackles for loss at Rich Central High outside of Chicago.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	10	Cooper Rush*	6-3	220	Jr.
RB	25	Devon Spalding	5-11	206	So.
FB	40	Joe Bacci	6-1	246	Jr.
WR	88	Jesse Kroll*	6-3	212	Sr.
WR	80	Anthony Rice	6-0	178	Jr.
TE	89	Ben McCord	6-4	238	Sr.
LT	77	Ramadan Ahmeti*	6-7	296	Sr.
LG	63	Connor Collins	6-3	300	Jr.
C	54	Nick Beamish*	6-3	310	Sr.
RG	75	Kenny Rogers*	6-6	295	Sr.
RT	74	Derek Edwards	6-5	303	So.

DEFENSE

DE	45	Joe Ostman*	6-3	248	Jr.
NT	95	Shafer Johnson	6-1	343	Jr.
DT	52	Jabari Dean*	6-2	283	Jr.
DE	2	Blake Serpa*	6-3	254	Sr.
LB	43	Tim Hamilton	6-1	240	Sr.
LB	32	Jeff Perry	6-2	232	So.
LB	31	Malik Fountain	6-2	228	Fr.
CB	16	Stefon Armstead	5-10	178	Sr.
CB	4	Brandon Greer*	6-1	200	Sr.
S	5	Kavon Frazier	6-0	222	Sr.
S	18	Tony Annese*	6-1	203	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	96	Brian Eavey*	6-2	195	So.
P	17	Ron Coluzzi*	5-11	182	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	OKLAHOMA STATE
Sept. 12	MONMOUTH (NJ)
Sept. 19	at Syracuse
Sept. 26	at Michigan State
Oct. 3	NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Oct. 10	at Western Michigan
Oct. 17	BUFFALO
Oct. 24	at Ball State
Oct. 31	at Akron
Nov. 10	TOLEDO
Nov. 18	at Kent State
Nov. 27	EASTERN MICHIGAN

2014 RESULTS

W	CHATTANOOGA	20-16
W	at Purdue	38-17
L	SYRACUSE	3-40
L	at Kansas	10-24
L	at Toledo	28-42
W	OHIO	28-10
W	at Northern Illinois	34-17
L	BALL STATE	29-32
W	at Buffalo	20-14
W	at Eastern Michigan	38-7
W	MIAMI (OH)	34-27
L	WESTERN MICHIGAN	20-32
	Bahamas Bowl	
L	vs. Western Kentucky	48-49

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	26.9	79
Rushing	155.2	74
Passing	242.8	52
Total	398.1	67

DEFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	25.2	T-45
Rushing	122.9	21
Passing	232.5	73
Total	355.5	29

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	RANK
- 5	- 0.38	T-95

OHIO | BOBCATS

MAC rank: 5 Record: 6-6 MAC record: 4-4 (2nd, East) Stadium: Peden Stadium (24,000)

RANKING 92

BOBCATS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Athens, Ohio
COACH: Frank Solich — At Ohio: 72-56, 10 years; overall: 130-75, 16 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tim Albin
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jimmy Burrow

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1968
LAST BOWL: 2013, St. Petersburg
RETURNING STARTERS: 17; 8 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Derrius Vick, LG Mike Lucas, DE Kurt Laseak, DE Tarell Basham, LB Blair Brown, LB Quentin Poling, FS Toran Davis, LB Javon Johnson

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Everywhere on the roster, the Bobcats have more speed and playmakers than last season's team. There's more talent and depth at running back, and the linebackers are a source of strength. Solich has his troops motivated to end a three-year run of a reduction of victories.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Offensive line injuries derailed some progress in the spring, and that is an area to watch in the fall. QBs Vick and J.D. Sprague were inconsistent last season, and with Solich still up in the air on his starter, the issues at quarterback could linger into the season.

OFFENSE

Veteran coach Frank Solich is counting on upgraded play at running back and wide receiver to help fuel an offensive turnaround.

Derrius Vick and J.D. Sprague are expected to battle for the starting quarterback job up until the season opener, and maybe beyond.

Vick suffered a knee injury that sidelined him for a month last season, but Sprague was mostly ineffective in Vick's absence. They nearly split the passing attempts, with Sprague completing 98 of 202 throws, and Vick tallying a 58.7 completion rate on 94 of 160.

The running game was dreadful at times last year, thanks mostly to problems holding onto the ball, allowing true freshman A.J. Ouellette to emerge as the feature back. Ouellette took full advantage of the opportunity, rushing for a team-high 785 yards.

Speedy Dorian Brown, physical Maleek Irons and experienced senior Daz'mond Patterson give Solich the most depth at running back in his tenure.

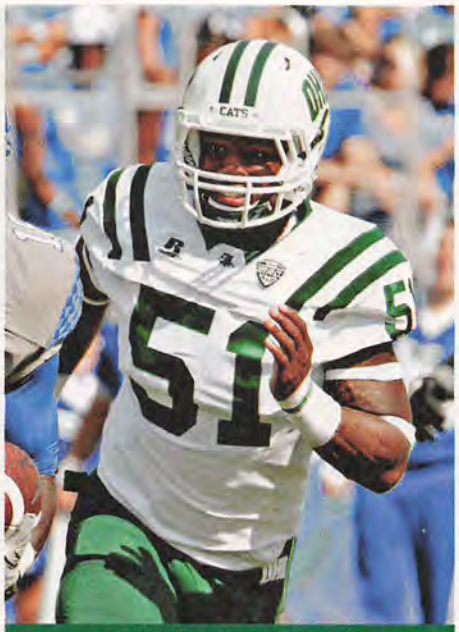
The Bobcats will have to get more production from their wide receivers following a season in which no receiver caught more than 31 passes or tallied 450 yards receiving. Solich believes he has more playmakers and speed at the position, most notably mentioning versatile Papi White.

Injuries hampered the Bobcats' progress on the offensive line in the spring. Lucas Powell and Durrell Wood were among the injured, but a surprising amount of returnees mixed with underclassmen give the Bobcats surprising depth.

DEFENSE

Ends Tarell Basham and Kurt Laseak are proven playmakers returning on defense, and the Bobcats definitely need big years from both of them. Establishing depth on the defensive line is a priority due to the lack of experience at key spots.

There's no doubt that the linebackers form the strength of Ohio's defense, as Blair Brown, Jovon Johnson, Quentin Poling and Chad Moore can help offset some issues at defensive line and the secondary.



JOVON JOHNSON
Photo by AP Photo/Garry Jones

"This is the most depth that we've had at running back and most speed we've had with that group."
— Coach Frank Solich

Poling, Johnson and Brown finished 1-2-3 in tackles last season.

Kyle Nelson was moved from cornerback to safety, and safety Devin Jones is expected to supply some experience to a secondary that was riddled with injuries during the spring.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Josiah Yazdani isn't a long-range threat, but he proved to be accurate inside 40 yards, where he made 13 of 16 field goal attempts. Mitch Bonnstetter averaged a respectable 41.8 yards per punt. Kyle Nelson is slated to be the kick returner and Papi White will help out on kick and punt returns.

OVERVIEW

For the third straight season, since posting a 10-4 record in 2011, the Bobcats had a reduction in victories. The lack of offensive firepower and instability at quarterback played a big factor in a 6-6 season. The Bobcats, for a change, have depth at key positions, combined with young, athletic players to put them in a position to contend for the East Division title. Besides road games at Bowling Green and Northern Illinois, the Bobcats' schedule is favorable and poses the possibility of a strong start.

TOP NEWCOMER

S Deontai Williams: A surprise last-minute flip from Georgia, Williams actually originally committed to Florida. Williams (6-0, 175) had nearly 20 offers and should have an opportunity to play right away at Ohio.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	15	Derrius Vick*	6-1	196	Sr.
RB	45	A.J. Ouellette*	5-10	195	So.
WR	12	Jordan Reid	6-3	198	Jr.
WR	6	Sebastian Smith	6-3	183	Jr.
WR	85	Brendan Cope*	6-2	189	So.
TE	82	Troy Mangen*	6-5	252	Jr.
LT	75	Mike McQueen*	6-6	287	Sr.
LG	67	Mike Lucas*	6-4	313	Sr.
C	54	Lucas Powell*	6-3	296	Sr.
RG	57	Durrell Wood	6-2	306	So.
RT	79	Troy Watson*	6-6	293	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	93	Tarell Basham*	6-4	250	Jr.
NG	34	Watson Tautuiaki	6-2	304	Sr.
DT	44	Casey Sayles*	6-3	268	Jr.
DE	99	Kurt Laseak	6-4	236	Jr.
LB	33	Blair Brown*	6-0	230	Jr.
LB	32	Quentin Poling*	6-0	219	So.
LB	51	Jovon Johnson*	6-0	215	Sr.
CB	41	Ian Wells*	5-11	202	Sr.
CB	22	Brett Layton	5-11	180	Sr.
SS	13	Devin Jones*	6-1	202	Sr.
FS	24	Toran Davis	6-0	206	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	39	Josiah Yazdani*	5-10	216	Sr.
P	23	Mitch Bonnstetter*	5-11	187	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at Idaho
Sept. 12	MARSHALL
Sept. 19	S.E. LOUISIANA
Sept. 26	at Minnesota
Oct. 3	at Akron
Oct. 10	MIAMI (OH)
Oct. 17	WESTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 24	at Buffalo
Nov. 4	at Bowling Green
Nov. 10	KENT STATE
Nov. 17	BALL STATE
Nov. 24	at Northern Illinois

2014 RESULTS

W	at Kent State	17-14
L	at Kentucky	3-20
L	at Marshall	14-44
W	IDAHO	36-24
W	EASTERN ILLINOIS	34-19
L	at Central Michigan	10-28
L	BOWLING GREEN	13-31
W	AKRON	23-20
L	at Western Michigan	21-42
W	BUFFALO	37-14
L	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	14-21
W	at Miami (OH)	24-21

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	20.5	111
Rushing	164.1	59
Passing	206.2	81
Total	370.3	91
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.8	T-40
Rushing	132.9	25
Passing	261.4	104
Total	394.3	59
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 4	- 0.33	T-92

WESTERN MICHIGAN | BRONCOS

MAC rank: 6 Record: 8-5 MAC record: 6-2 (3rd, West) Stadium: Waldo Stadium (30,200)

RANKING 96

BRONCOS at a GLANCE

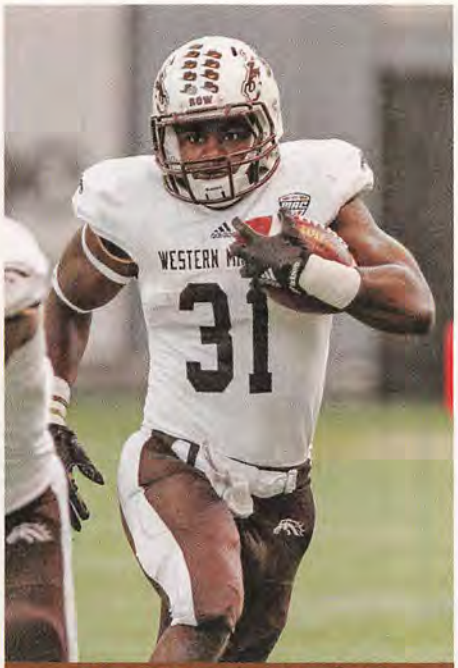
LOCATION: Kalamazoo, Mich.
COACH: P.J. Fleck — At WMU and overall: 9-16, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kirk Ciarrocca
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Ed Pinkham

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1988
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 18: 9 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Zach Terrell, RB Jarvion Franklin, WR Corey Davis, WR Daniel Braverman, CB Ronald Zamort, LB Robert Spillane

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The strength of the team is its experience. Terrell's increased leadership and feel for the spread attack will be a benefit. Added depth on defense should help WMU give opponents different looks in different situations. There is speed at linebacker, including from projected backups Eddie Rolle and Alex Grace, who should complement the all-around play of the starters.

PRIMARY PROBLEMS: Nose tackle is the team's biggest question mark. The quarterback depth chart is murky as best. Tom Flacco, the younger brother of Baltimore Ravens' QB Joe Flacco, will enter fall camp as the backup, but there's not much separation from redshirt freshman Chance Stewart.



JARVION FRANKLIN
Photo by Loren Orr/ Icon Sportswire via AP Images

OFFENSE

WMU returns nearly every starter and could have an even stronger attack than last year, when the Broncos averaged almost 34 points per game.

Freshman All-American running back Jarvion Franklin became an instant superstar and finished a superb first season with 1,551 yards and 24 touchdowns as one of the top backs in the country. Franklin should again be the centerpiece of WMU's run-first spread offense that's powered a beefy offensive line.

Freshman John Keenoy had a superb spring and is set to be the starting center. Senior left guard James Kristof, an NFL prospect, is a four-year starter. Senior left tackle Willie Beavers is a three-year starter.

Redshirt junior quarterback Zach Terrell had a breakout season last year. He threw for 3,443 yards and completed nearly 68 percent of his passes as the sixth-most efficient QB in the country. His favorite target Corey Davis, an NFL-level receiver, returns for his junior season after finishing seventh in the country in receiving yards last year with 1,408.

DEFENSE

The Broncos return seven starters in a 4-3 blitz-heavy scheme that took a big step forward last year. WMU gave up just under 25 points per game last season after giving up more than 35 per contest in 2013.

WMU doesn't have a player who can eat up double teams the way nose tackle Richard Ash did last year, but junior David Curle, sophomore Nick Matich and incoming freshman Ken Finley will try to do it by committee.

Strong play up front will free up an athletic linebacker corps, which will be the deepest it has been in the past three years.

Sophomore Darius Phillips was a dynamic receiver last year, but he moved to corner in the spring to fill the big shoes of Donald Celiscar and was impressive. He will work opposite senior Ronald Zamort, who finished tied with Celiscar with 1.6 passes defended per game, which tied for the national lead.

> "It's a long way to the top of the mountain from the foundation, but we've finally gotten out of the foundation phase."
>
> — Coach P.J. Fleck

SPECIAL TEAMS

Place-kicker Andrew Haldeman returns for his senior season after making 14 of 17 field goal attempts last year, with a long of 44. Haldeman still struggled at times on PATs (51 of 56), and no miss was bigger than one that would have tied the score in overtime in a 20-19 loss to Toledo. Senior punter J. Schroeder returns after yet another solid season when he finished second in the MAC with an average of 42.8 yards.

OVERALL

With two consecutive recruiting classes that ranked best in the MAC, Western Michigan is finally developing the depth needed to be a true contender in the conference. A seven-win turnaround last year creates increased expectations for 2015, but WMU's schedule is not kind. Michigan State, Sun Belt champ Georgia Southern and defending national champion Ohio State are on the non-conference slate. Conference matchups against MAC East champ Bowling Green, overall MAC champion Northern Illinois and Toledo await the Broncos in the final three weeks.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Carrington Thompson: The 6-2, 162-pounder transferred to WMU last year after playing two years at Northwood University. He is a fast, athletic weapon who can be a game-changer, but he still must prove he can play at a high level consistently.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	11	Zach Terrell*	6-1	204	Jr.
RB	31	Jarvion Franklin*	6-0	220	So.
WR	84	Corey Davis*	6-3	205	Jr.
WR	8	Daniel Braverman*	5-10	177	Jr.
WR	9	Kendrick Roberts*	6-3	209	Sr.
TE	89	Eric Boyden*	6-4	251	Sr.
LT	70	Willie Beavers*	6-5	309	Sr.
LG	79	James Kristof*	6-3	320	Sr.
C	52	John Keenoy	6-2	282	Fr.
RG	72	Taylor Moton*	6-5	316	Jr.
RT	77	Chukwuma Okorafor	6-6	308	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	98	Jarrell McKinney*	6-4	241	Sr.
DL	68	David Curle	6-2	291	Jr.
DL	8	Cleveland Smith*	6-1	262	Sr.
DE	53	Nathan Braster*	6-5	258	So.
LB	10	Robert Spillane*	6-2	235	So.
LB	40	Grant DePalma*	5-9	218	Sr.
LB	38	Austin Lewis	6-3	230	Jr.
CB	14	Darius Phillips	5-10	184	So.
CB	7	Ronald Zamort*	5-10	174	Sr.
S	6	Asantay Brown	6-0	198	So.
S	1	Rontavious Atkins*	6-0	207	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	45	Andrew Haldeman*	5-10	180	Sr.
P	37	J. Schroeder*	6-0	203	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	MICHIGAN STATE
Sept. 12	at Georgia Southern
Sept. 19	MURRAY STATE
Sept. 26	at Ohio State
Oct. 10	CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Oct. 17	at Ohio
Oct. 24	MIAMI (OH)
Oct. 29	at Eastern Michigan
Nov. 5	BALL STATE
Nov. 11	BOWLING GREEN
Nov. 18	at Northern Illinois
Nov. 27	at Toledo

2014 RESULTS

L	at Purdue	34-43
W	at Idaho	45-33
W	MURRAY STATE	45-14
L	at Virginia Tech	17-35
L	TOLEDO (OT)	19-20
W	at Ball State	42-38
W	at Bowling Green	26-14
W	OHIO	42-21
W	at Miami (OH)	41-10
W	EASTERN MICHIGAN	51-7
W	at Central Michigan	32-20
L	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	21-31
	Idaho Potato Bowl	
L	vs. Air Force	24-38

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	33.8	32
Rushing	170.8	55
Passing	267.3	34
Total	438.2	39
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.9	T-42
Rushing	153.5	47
Passing	217.6	48
Total	371.2	45
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 3	+ 0.23	T-48

BUFFALO | BULLS

MAC rank: 7 | Record: 5-6 | MAC record: 3-4 (3rd, East) | Stadium: UB Stadium (29,013)

RANKING 100

BULLS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Buffalo, N.Y.
COACH: Lance Leipold — At Buffalo, 1st year; overall: 109-6, 8 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Andy Kotelnicki
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brian Borland

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2008
LAST BOWL: 2013, Idaho Potato
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 7 offense, 4 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Joe Licata, RB Anthone Taylor, WR Ron Willoughby, LB Jarrett Franklin, LB Okezie Alozie

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The offense has two of the premier talents in the MAC in Licata and Taylor, and they will be complemented by a capable receiving corps. If the three new starters up front are quick learners, the Bulls should put a lot of points on the scoreboard. Punter Tyler Grassman is a significant asset in the field-position battle.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The defense looks too young and inexperienced to be an impact unit, at least in the first half of the season. Leipold introduces a fresh scheme on defense, but the Bulls will have a tough time making up for the lack of elite talent and their overall dearth of experience.

ANTHONE TAYLOR
Photo by Kevin Hoffman-USA TODAY Sports

"You can start seeing our guys are more comfortable with what we're doing."
— Lance Leipold

OFFENSE

New coach Lance Leipold has seven returning starters, including a potent one-two punch in the backfield — four-year starter Joe Licata at quarterback and bruising Anthone Taylor at running back.

Licata passed for 2,647 yards and 29 touchdowns in 11 games last year. He holds the school record with 60 career TD tosses.

Taylor presents a formidable combination of strength and speed, which he rode to 1,403 rushing yards last season — his first as a starter. Taylor scored 12 touchdowns, and his 127.5 rushing yards per game ranked second in the conference.

The receiving corps lacks an explosive threat but should get consistency from its returning starters and a talented transfer. Ron Willoughby is the top returning wide receiver after his 50 catches for 771 yards and nine touchdowns earned him third-team all-conference honors. UAB transfer Collin Lisa is an athletic and sure-handed addition, while veteran tight end Matt Weiser is another good option.

The biggest question mark is the line, where there will be three new starters. John Kling and Robert Blodgett should anchor the unit at the tackle spots. Senior Dillon Guy adds some experience at a guard, but the Bulls get very young up front after that.

DEFENSE

The Bulls will transition from a three-man defensive front to the four-man configuration preferred by Leipold, but that will not be the only change. With just four starters back, much will be new on this side of the ball.

Brandon Crawford and Max Perisse have some starting experience and will have to lead the rebuild from the tackle positions. Solomon Jackson moves from linebacker to end to help bolster the unit.

Jarrett Franklin is one of the Bulls' top returning tacklers, and he should be joined at linebacker by Okezie Alozie, who had three sacks in eight starts last season.

Buffalo expects a strong part of its defense to be cornerbacks Marqus Baker and Boise Ross. The safety positions should be manned by Andrews Dadeboe and Ryan Williamson, who each played in all 11 games last season.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Bulls expect fourth-year starter Tyler Grassman to be one of the top punters in the conference in 2015. Opponents last season managed only 32 total return yards on 50 punts from Grassman, who averaged 40.7 yards per attempt. Experience is non-existent in the place-kicking game, where Adam Mitcheson, who redshirted last season, gets first crack at the job.

OVERVIEW

High expectations will prove to be either a blessing or a curse for Leipold, who joined the Bulls after going 109-6 at Wisconsin-Whitewater, where he won six Division III national championships in his eight seasons. He gets his baptism into the Mid-American Conference with a team that returns significant talent at the skill positions on offense, but is young and unproven defensively.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Collin Lisa: The former all-state selection in Georgia transferred to Buffalo in January from UAB after the Blazers dissolved their program. The sure-handed Lisa had 116 receptions over his final two seasons in high school. The sophomore should crack the starting lineup in what could be a busy receiving corps.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	16	**Joe Licata***	6-2	227	Sr.
RB	1	**Anthone Taylor***	5-10	207	Sr.
FB	31	Kendall Patterson	6-0	238	Sr.
WR	86	**Ron Willoughby***	6-4	199	Sr.
WR	13	Collin Lisa	5-10	180	So.
TE	89	**Matt Weiser***	6-5	245	Sr.
LT	70	**John Kling***	6-7	324	Sr.
LG	65	Dillon Guy	6-4	335	Sr.
C	77	James O'Hagan	6-2	293	Fr.
RG	61	Brandon Manosalvas	6-4	308	So.
RT	74	**Robert Blodgett***	6-5	311	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	91	Demone Harris	6-4	270	So.
DT	55	**Brandon Crawford***	6-2	275	Jr.
DT	66	Max Perisse	6-4	271	Jr.
DE	41	Solomon Jackson	6-1	240	So.
LB	3	**Okezie Alozie***	6-0	217	Sr.
LB	36	**Jarrett Franklin***	6-0	217	Jr.
LB	43	Nick Gilbo	6-1	222	Sr.
CB	1	**Boise Ross***	6-0	182	Jr.
CB	5	Marqus Baker	5-10	181	Sr.
S	17	Andrews Dadeboe	6-1	196	Jr.
S	26	Ryan Williamson	6-0	182	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	19	Adam Mitcheson	6-1	187	Fr.
P	11	**Tyler Grassman***	6-1	195	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	ALBANY
Sept. 12	at Penn State
Sept. 19	at FAU
Sept. 26	NEVADA
Oct. 3	BOWLING GREEN
Oct. 17	at Central Michigan
Oct. 24	OHIO
Oct. 29	at Miami (OH)
Nov. 5	at Kent State
Nov. 11	NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Nov. 21	at Akron
Nov. 27	MASSACHUSETTS

2014 RESULTS

W	DUQUESNE	38-28
L	at Army	39-47
L	BAYLOR	21-63
W	NORFOLK STATE	36-7
W	MIAMI (OH)	35-27
L	at Bowling Green	35-36
L	at Eastern Michigan	27-37
L	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	14-20
L	at Ohio	14-37
W	AKRON	55-24
	KENT STATE	Cancelled
W	at Massachusetts	41-21

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	32.3	41
Rushing	178.6	52
Passing	259.5	41
Total	438.2	38
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	31.5	95
Rushing	175.2	76
Passing	222.5	54
Total	397.7	62
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 3	- 0.27	88

KENT STATE | GOLDEN FLASHES

MAC rank: 8 | Record: 2-9 | MAC record: 1-6 (7th, East) | Stadium: Dix Stadium (25,000)

RANKING 105

GOLDEN FLASHES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Kent, Ohio
COACH: Paul Haynes — At Kent State and overall: 6-17, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Don Treadwell
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brian George

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1972
LAST BOWL: 2012, GoDaddy.com
RETURING STARTERS: 16; 6 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Colin Reardon, RB Trayion Durham, RB Nick Holley, OL Rena Reda, CB Najee Murray, SS Jordan Italiano, FS Nate Holley

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Durham is back after leading the Golden Flashes in rushing in 2013. The defense returns eight starters, with the linebackers and secondary potentially forming one of the best units in the conference.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The lack of depth at defensive end could complicate matters if injuries occur. There's a glaring concern at quarterback and finding playmakers at wide receiver for an offense that was one of the nation's worst last season.

COLIN REARDON
Photo by Geoff Burke-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Kent State's one-dimensional offense from last season never recovered after losing leading running back Trayion Durham to a season-ending foot injury before the season. Kent State finished 122nd nationally in rushing, averaging 81.8 yards per game.

Kent State's running game should be in better shape with the punishing Durham and Nick Holley, plus rising sophomore Miles Hibbler. New coordinator Don Treadwell brings experience and a fresh perspective, though his job is daunting.

The passing game is a big question mark, and not just because junior Colin Reardon and sophomore Nathan Strock are locked in a battle to be the starting quarterback. The Flashes also lost their top two pass catchers from last season.

Junior Ernest Calhoun, who caught 33 passes for 319 yards last season, is the leading returner.

The line is bolstered by the return of senior Anthony Pruitt, who sat out last season. Left tackle Reno Reda and left guard Alex Nielsen are building blocks for what could be a solid, and deep, unit.

DEFENSE

Another year of development and seasoning is the recipe for improvement for a defense that finished 107th in the country against the run last season. The Golden Flashes have played a number of freshmen and sophomores in the first two years of coach Paul Haynes' tenure.

Defensive tackle Chris Fairchild sat out last season because of grades, but his return immediately gives Kent State's defense a play-making force against the run. Haynes is pinning his hopes on Nate Terhune, Jon Cunningham and Terence Waugh, among others, to help the line blossom into a productive group.

Matt Dellinger, Darius Redmond, Elcee Refuge and Marques Moore headline an athletic and instinctive group of linebackers that has the potential to be one of the best in the conference.

Safeties Nate Holley and Jordan Italiano are coming off big seasons. Cornerback Najee Murray, an Ohio State transfer, showed his big-play ability in his first season at Kent State.

> "You had to feel bad for Kent State and Coach Haynes and his staff last season. Almost everything went wrong for them."
> — Rival MAC head coach

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Anthony Melchiori deserved team MVP after averaging 44.3 yards per punt, placing him 12th in the country. Melchiori's field-goal kicking took a tumble, though, as he made just 10 of 18 attempts.

OVERVIEW

Kent State's season hit its share of speed bumps last season: Haynes being hospitalized last spring; the sudden death of starting center Jason Bitsko in fall camp; an influx of injuries on the offensive line; a snowstorm canceling the final road game of the season at Buffalo.

The momentum from an 11-3 record in 2012 under Darrell Hazel is nearly gone. The Golden Flashes are dangerously slipping back toward their 12-year run from 1989-2000 when they won just 16 games. Haynes must deal with a difficult non-conference slate of games against Illinois, Minnesota and Marshall. An improved offense and better health might be the tonic to help the Golden Flashes make a winning run through a relatively easy conference slate.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Dominic Hill: The freshman could muscle his way onto the two-deep with a strong showing in fall camp. At 6-1, 275 pounds, Hill is a competitive power-lifter who could be ready to handle work in the trenches right away.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	10	**Colin Reardon***	6-1	202	Jr.
RB	34	Trayion Durham	6-1	250	Sr.
WR	25	**Ernest Calhoun***	5-6	151	Jr.
WR	19	Josh Boyle	5-9	173	Sr.
WR	3	**Kris White***	6-1	210	So.
TE	13	Brice Fackler	6-3	234	Jr.
LT	55	**Reno Reda***	6-6	292	Jr.
LG	63	**Alex Nielsen***	6-4	294	Jr.
C	62	Nathan Puthoff	6-4	296	So.
RG	66	Anthony Pruitt	6-2	300	Sr.
RT	74	**Brock Macaulay***	6-5	290	So.

DEFENSE

DE	52	Clay Miller	6-4	270	Sr.
DT	69	**Nate Terhune***	6-4	270	Sr.
NT	90	**Jon Cunningham***	6-0	295	So.
DE	51	Terence Waugh	6-1	250	Jr.
LB	32	**Matt Dellinger***	6-1	225	Sr.
LB	36	**Darius Redmond***	6-0	210	Jr.
STAR	7	**Elcee Refuge***	5-9	230	Jr.
CB	12	Najee Murray	5-9	180	Jr.
CB	21	**Demetrius Monday***	5-10	197	So.
SS	23	**Jordan Italiano***	5-10	207	Sr.
FS	18	**Nate Holley***	5-11	200	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	14	**Anthony Melchiori***	5-11	186	Sr.
P	14	**Anthony Melchiori***	5-11	186	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	at Illinois
Sept. 12	DELAWARE STATE
Sept. 19	at Minnesota
Sept. 26	MARSHALL
Oct. 3	MIAMI (OH)
Oct. 10	at Toledo
Oct. 17	at Massachusetts
Oct. 24	BOWLING GREEN
Nov. 5	BUFFALO
Nov. 10	at Ohio
Nov. 18	CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Nov. 27	at Akron

2014 RESULTS

L	OHIO	14-17
L	SOUTH ALABAMA	13-23
L	at Ohio State	0-66
L	at Virginia	13-45
L	at Northern Illinois	14-17
L	MASSACHUSETTS	17-40
W	ARMY	39-17
L	at Miami (OH)	3-10
L	TOLEDO	20-30
L	at Bowling Green	20-30
	at Buffalo	Cancelled
W	AKRON	27-24

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	16.4	120
Rushing	81.8	122
Passing	233.6	60
Total	315.5	116
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	29.0	81
Rushing	214.0	107
Passing	216.3	45
Total	430.3	88
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 4	- 0.36	94

AKRON | ZIPS

MAC rank: 9 Record: 5-7 MAC record: 3-5 (T-4th) Stadium: InfoCision Stadium (30,000)

RANKING 106

ZIPS at a GLANCE

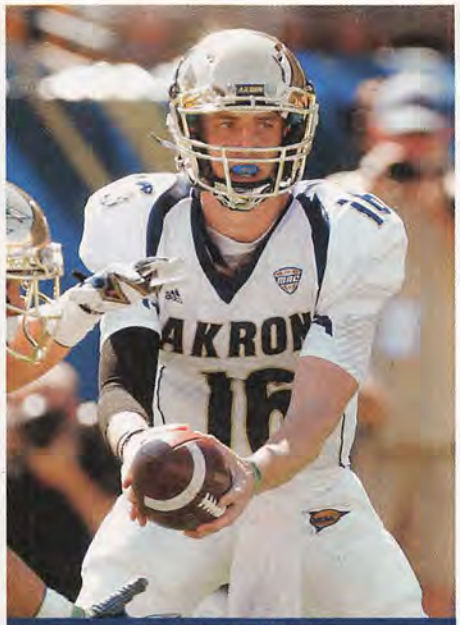
LOCATION: Akron, Ohio
COACH: Terry Bowden — At Akron: 11-25, 3 years; overall: 151-87-2, 21 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: A.J. Milwee
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Chuck Amato

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2005
LAST BOWL: 2005, Motor City
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 7 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Kyle Pohl, RB Conor Hundley, NT Cody Grice, DE Jamal Marcus, DE Se'Von Pittman, LB Jatavis Brown, DB Kris Givens

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The influx of talented transfers, especially on defense, is a positive sign for a program coming off a five-win season. The defense has the potential to be the best in the conference, keeping the scores down until the offense works through some early-season kinks. The offensive line is filled with experienced players.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: There's some instability at quarterback and wide receiver. Although a senior, Pohl is not a lock to start at quarterback. The Zips don't have game-changing receivers.



KYLE POHL
Photo by AP Photo/Keith Srakocic

OFFENSE

The offense was supposed to be stable enough to carry the Zips to a strong finish in 2014. Instead, quarterback Kyle Pohl battled with injuries midway through the season, the running game faltered and the Zips averaged just 22.6 points per game.

Pohl, a senior, is locked in a three-way battle for the starting position after completing 54 percent of his passes, with nine touchdowns and eight interceptions. Sophomore Thomas Woodson and Pittsburgh transfer Tra'Von Chapman, a dual-threat quarterback, are locked with Pohl for the starting spot.

Conor Hundley returns at running back, where Colorado State transfer Donnell Alexander will help the position with his size and physical style. Hakeem Lawrence's speed nicely complements the power running of Hundley and Alexander.

Andrew Pratt and Fransohn Bickley lead the receiving group. Mykel Traylor-Bennett had four receiving touchdowns in a reserve role last season.

In the past, poor line play has hampered the Zips' offense. This veteran line, with four returning starters, has a chance to help the offense take a step forward.

DEFENSE

Coordinator Chuck Amato has been putting his stamp on a rapidly improving unit for the past two years. The Zips finished first in the conference in scoring defense and third in total defense in 2014.

The front seven is an area of strength and is athletic enough to be among the best in the conference once again.

A wave of transfers combined with five returning starters could make this Amato's most athletic defense. Ohio State transfers Se'Von Pittman and Jamal Marcus bring athleticism and speed at defensive end. Pittman had a solid first season in Akron, while Marcus earned rave reviews during the spring.

Linebacker Darryl Monroe, a Washington State transfer, and defensive tackle Rodney Coe (via Iowa State) should help ease the loss of Justin March and Nordly Capi. Linebacker Jatavis Brown led the Zips with 99 tackles last season, while linebacker Dylan Evans had an impressive spring.

Miami transfer Larry Hope joins cornerbacks John Senter, Kris Givens and DeAndre Scott in an upgraded secondary.

> "We still have some work to do, but we're solid on defense and growing on offense."
>
> — Terry Bowden

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Robert Stein connected on 13 of 18 field goal attempts last season. Senior Zach Paul is one of the top punters in the conference, averaging 42.5 yards per attempt last season. The kickoff and punt returns spots are wide open, but after finishing 10th and 12th in those conference categories, respectively, change is a good thing.

OVERVIEW

The Zips' spiral during the second half of the 2014 season spoiled any momentum gained from Terry Bowden's first two seasons. The Zips lost five of their last six following a 4-2 start. An infusion of talented transfers brings athleticism and depth to help offset key injuries and graduation losses. With the defense poised to make more incremental improvement, Akron should push back toward a winning record while competing in a MAC East that looks down again, except for Bowling Green.

TOP NEWCOMER

DE Jamal Marcus: After sitting out last season following a transfer from Ohio State, Marcus, a former four-star recruit, was a big factor during spring practice. He played in 24 games for the Buckeyes, including starting in the 2014 Orange Bowl against Clemson.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	16	**Kyle Pohl***	6-3	217	Sr.
RB	34	**Conor Hundley***	5-10	213	Sr.
WR	80	Andrew Pratt	6-5	210	Sr.
WR	82	Austin Wolf	6-3	204	So.
WR	4	Fransohn Bickley	5-6	147	Jr.
TE	35	Newman Williams	6-2	240	Fr.
LT	56	**Isaiah Williams***	6-3	295	Sr.
LG	75	**Dylan Brumbaugh***	6-5	309	Sr.
C	57	Stephen Ericksen	6-3	305	So.
RG	55	**Tommy Brown***	6-4	310	Sr.
RT	71	**Quaison Osborne***	6-3	305	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	90	**Se'Von Pittman***	6-3	268	Jr.
DT	91	Rodney Coe	6-3	305	Sr.
NG	36	**Cody Grice***	5-11	284	Sr.
DE	34	Jamal Marcus	6-2	240	Jr.
LB	54	Dylan Evans	6-2	211	Sr.
LB	59	John Rachal	5-11	225	Jr.
LB	1	**Jatavis Brown***	5-11	217	Sr.
CB	21	**Kris Givens***	5-9	163	Sr.
CB	6	**DeAndre Scott***	5-11	180	Jr.
SS	14	Jerome Lane	6-3	212	So.
FS	41	Zach Guiser	6-1	205	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	48	**Robert Stein***	5-8	169	Sr.
P	38	**Zach Paul***	6-3	216	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Oklahoma
Sept. 12	PITTSBURGH
Sept. 19	SAVANNAH STATE
Sept. 26	at Louisiana
Oct. 3	OHIO
Oct. 10	at Eastern Michigan
Oct. 17	at Bowling Green
Oct. 31	CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Nov. 7	at Massachusetts
Nov. 14	at Miami (OH)
Nov. 21	BUFFALO
Nov. 27	KENT STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	HOWARD	41-0
L	at Penn State	3-21
L	MARSHALL	17-48
W	at Pittsburgh	21-10
W	EASTERN MICHIGAN	31-6
W	MIAMI (OH)	29-19
L	at Ohio	20-23
L	at Ball State	21-35
L	BOWLING GREEN	10-27
L	at Buffalo	24-55
W	MASSACHUSETTS	30-6
L	at Kent State	24-27

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	22.6	101
Rushing	123.7	106
Passing	249.6	49
Total	373.3	88

DEFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	23.1	28
Rushing	148.6	43
Passing	222.5	53
Total	371.1	44

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	RANK
- 2	- 0.17	T-76

MASSACHUSETTS | MINUTEMEN

MAC rank: 10 Record: 3-9 MAC record: 3-5 (T-4th, East) Stadium: McGuirk Alumni Stadium (17,000)

RANKING 115

MINUTEMEN at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Amherst, Mass.
COACH: Mark Whipple — At UMass: 52-35, 7 years; overall: 124-68, 17 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mark Whipple
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tom Masella

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2007, Colonial co-champions
LAST BOWL: (2007, FCS playoffs)
RETURNING STARTERS: 19; 10 offense, 9 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Blake Frohnapfel, WR Tajae Sharpe, TE Rodney Mills, LB Jovan Santos-Knox, CB Randall Jette, CB Trey Dudley-Giles

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: With all-conference candidate Frohnapfel back healthy, UMass boasts the MAC's most explosive passing offense, and it should keep the team in every game. Overall, the team is one of the most experienced in the conference.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Replacing Jean Sifrin's all-league production at tight end won't be easy. Opponents will breathe easier now that he's gone. The defense can't afford to allow more than 400 yards per game again.

BLAKE FROHNAPFEL
Photo by AP Photo/Michael Dwyer

OFFENSE

As expected, Mark Whipple's return to the program he led to the 1998 Division I-AA national title reinvigorated UMass and led it to offensive heights it hadn't seen for years. Under his pro-style system, the Minutemen averaged 421.1 yards and 27.3 points per game last season, up from a scant 281 yards and 11.7 points in 2013.

Transfer quarterback Blake Frohnapfel missed the end of last season with a leg injury, but he returns having thrown for 3,345 yards and 23 touchdowns in just 10 games. Frohnapfel will be among the top quarterbacks in the MAC, a league known for its quarterbacks.

Top wideout Tajae Sharpe (85 catches, 1,281 yards, seven touchdowns in 2014) returns for his senior year and, with Frohnapfel throwing to him, is poised to break UMass' career record for yards and receptions. He's already receiving NFL draft buzz.

Behind Sharpe, veterans Jalen Williams and Marken Michel round out a deep receiving corps that should help offset the early loss of tight end Jean Sifrin to the NFL.

UMass utilized a running back-by-committee approach last year and figures to do so again in 2015. Veteran runners Shadrach Abrokwah (578 yards), Lorenzo Woodley (415) and Jamal Wilson should split carries.

The offensive line returns all five starters, with key contributors Josh Bruns and Lukas Kolter also having seen significant time last year. Left tackle Tyrell Smith is an All-MAC candidate.

DEFENSE

UMass returns the bulk of starters to its 3-4 defense, headlined by first-team All-MAC linebacker Jovan Santos-Knox, who ranked in the national top five in tackles last year with 143. He'll be joined by returning starters Trey Seals and Kassan Messiah in a unit that is looking to create more turnovers.

The defensive line brings back both bookends, but the emphasis will fall on new nose tackle Robert Kitching to take the next step and solidify the front seven.

Senior cornerbacks Randall Jette and Trey Dudley-Giles have played heavy snaps since their freshman years and will be relied on to lead the secondary. Khary Bailey-Smith (seven career interceptions) has a knack for big plays.

"It's time. It's finally time to get this done. We want to show everybody that we are a bowl team."
— LB Jovan Santos-Knox

SPECIAL TEAMS

The kicking game was another disaster in 2014 and it cost special teams coordinator Ted Daisher his job at midseason. Senior kicker Blake Lucas is the most experienced player in the group, but he should be passed over by incoming freshman Michael Caggiano. Junior Logan Laurent will take over punting duties full time.

OVERVIEW

After just five wins in three seasons of FBS play, UMass is primed to make a major leap in 2015. With a high-powered offense and the most returning starters in the conference, the Minutemen have their sights set squarely on a bowl berth in their final season in the MAC. The program becomes an independent in 2016.

TOP NEWCOMER

K Michael Caggiano: Field goals and extra points have been an absolute nightmare for the Minutemen the past two years. The team finally did something about it this offseason, bringing in one of the top-rated high school kickers in the Northeast. Caggiano, a New Jersey native voted second-team all-state in 2014, should start from day one.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	7	**Blake Frohnapfel***	6-6	229	Sr.
RB	22	**Shadrach Abrokwah***	5-9	202	Jr.
WR	1	**Tajae Sharpe***	6-4	200	Sr.
WR	80	**Jalen Williams***	6-3	191	Sr.
WR	10	**Marken Michel***	5-10	185	Sr.
TE	33	Rodney Mills	6-1	215	Sr.
LT	77	**Tyrell Smith***	6-5	315	Jr.
LG	71	**Michael Boland***	6-7	315	Jr.
C	78	**Matt Sparks***	6-4	280	Sr.
RG	73	**Fabian Hoeller***	6-3	295	Jr.
RT	68	**Elijah Wilkinson***	6-4	315	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	95	**Sha-Ki Holines***	6-3	260	So.
NT	92	Robert Kitching	6-1	307	Sr.
DT	5	**Peter Angeh***	6-2	258	Jr.
LB	3	**Kassan Messiah***	6-4	237	Sr.
LB	17	**Jovan Santos-Knox***	6-2	240	Sr.
LB	8	Shane Huber	6-3	250	So.
LB	54	**Trey Seals***	6-4	237	Sr.
CB	4	**Randall Jette***	5-11	180	Sr.
CB	9	**Trey Dudley-Giles***	5-11	182	Sr.
S	21	**Khary Bailey-Smith***	6-2	194	Sr.
S	25	**Joe Colton***	5-10	195	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	N/A	Michael Caggiano	5-10	170	Fr.
P	99	Logan Laurent	6-3	210	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 12	at Colorado
Sept. 19	TEMPLE
Sept. 26	at Notre Dame
Oct. 3	FIU
Oct. 10	at Bowling Green
Oct. 17	KENT STATE
Oct. 24	TOLEDO
Oct. 31	at Ball State
Nov. 7	AKRON
Nov. 14	at Eastern Michigan
Nov. 21	MIAMI (OH)
Nov. 27	at Buffalo

2014 RESULTS

L	BOSTON COLLEGE	7-30
L	COLORADO	38-41
L	at Vanderbilt	31-34
L	at Penn State	7-48
L	BOWLING GREEN	42-47
L	at Miami (Oh)	41-42
W	at Kent State	40-17
W	EASTERN MICHIGAN	36-14
L	at Toledo	35-42
W	BALL STATE	24-10
L	at Akron	6-30
L	BUFFALO	21-41

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	27.3	75
Rushing	109.3	112
Passing	311.8	11
Total	421.1	48
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	33.0	103
Rushing	191.8	90
Passing	255.8	99
Total	447.5	101
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 6	- 0.50	T-103

BALL STATE | CARDINALS

MAC rank: 11 Record: 5-7 MAC record: 4-4 (5th, West) Stadium: Scheumann Stadium (22,500)

RANKING 119

CARDINALS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Muncie, Ind.
COACH: Pete Lembo — At Ball State: 30-20, 4 years; overall: 109-56, 14 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Joey Lynch
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kevin Kelly

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1996
LAST BOWL: 2013, GoDaddy.com
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 9 offense, 6 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: WR Jordan Williams, WR KeVonn Mabon, OG Jalen Schlachter, C Jacob Richard, LB Zack Ryan, LB Ben Ingle

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Williams and Mabon form one of the best receiver combinations in the MAC. The offensive line returns intact, including three-year starters Richard and Schlachter. Linebackers Ryan and Ingle combined to make 178 tackles last year.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Jack Milas will start at QB after doing some good things last season, but he doesn't have the safety net of Ozzie Mann behind him. RBs Teddy Williamson and Darian Green have limited game experience, but at least one is going to have to become a player the offense can lean on.

OFFENSE

Quarterback Jack Milas took over at midseason last year and retained his No. 1 status in the spring. His spot was solidified when Ozzie Mann, the starter at the beginning of 2014, announced his transfer plans after spring practice.

Milas completed 115 of 209 passes for 1,302 yards with nine touchdowns and five interceptions before his season came to a premature end because of a broken wrist. He will be helped by the return of all five starters on the line and the top two receiving threats from 2014: KeVonn Mabon and Jordan Williams.

They combined, with near-equal contributions, for 115 receptions for 1,470 yards and 11 touchdowns.

One problem is the unexpected loss of running back Horactio Banks, who was diagnosed with a career-ending leg injury in the offseason. He was expected to take over the starting job in the absence of Jahwan Edwards, who finished his career last season as the school's all-time rushing leader.

Teddy Williamson and Darian Green will battle for the starting job at running back. James Gilbert, an early-enrolled true freshman, should also have a role.

DEFENSE

The Cardinals experimented with their alignments in spring drills. Second-year coordinator Kevin Kelly tinkered during the spring with a 4-down look, a 3-3 stack and a 4-3 without settling on one preferred front.

There is depth along the front line with Michael Ayers, Anthony Winbush, Osa Igbinosun and Joshua Posley at end, as well as inside players Darnell Smith, Keenan Noel, Julian Jackson and Kevin Willis.

Linebacker is also a position of strength with the return of leading tacklers Zack Ryan and Ben Ingle, along with Sean Wiggins. Ryan, a middle linebacker, had a team-high 91 stops last season.

There is concern in the back end with several players in the secondary trying to come back from injuries.

JORDAN WILLIAMS
Photo by AP Photo/Michael Conroy

"Jack Milas has taken all the 'one' snaps the entire spring. There's no reason, at this point, to change any of that."
— Pete Lembo on his QB situation

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Cardinals' main task on special teams will be to replace place-kicker Scott Secor, the Mid-American Conference Special Teams Player of the Year in 2014. Alex Egan, Steve Drida and Morgan Hagee will battle in fall camp for the kicking job.

Punter Kyle Schmidt is a two-year starter — he averaged 42.1 yards last season — but the Cardinals need improvement, ranking in the middle of the MAC in net punting average last year.

OVERVIEW

With perennial MAC championship contenders Northern Illinois and Toledo in the West Division, it's going to be difficult for Ball State to make a run at the division title. The defense appears average at best again this year after ranking smack dab in the middle of the MAC last year, and the offense has to make a major move forward. Strong play by Milas will be essential to the team's improvement. He must perform at a high level in a league where top teams almost always feature a top quarterback.

TOP NEWCOMER

DE Joshua Posley: He will immediately bid for a starting position after transferring a year ago from Cincinnati. The Cardinals love his potential, which includes playing the bigger end spot and still having the speed to be a true pass rusher.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	14	**Jack Milas***	6-0	215	Jr.
RB	41	Darian Green	5-8	175	So.
WR	8	**Jordan Williams***	6-2	224	Sr.
WR	30	**KeVonn Mabon***	6-1	215	Sr.
WR	80	**Chris Shillings***	6-1	206	Sr.
TE	40	Dylan Curry	6-4	259	Sr.
QT	78	**Drake Miller***	6-5	296	Sr.
QG	68	**Jeremiah Harvey***	6-1	298	Sr.
C	62	**Jacob Richard***	6-1	275	Sr.
SG	66	**Steve Bell***	6-4	290	Sr.
ST	65	**Jalen Schlachter***	6-6	316	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	9	**Michael Ayers***	6-1	238	Sr.
DT	95	**Darnell Smith***	5-11	270	Sr.
NT	92	Julian Jackson	6-1	305	Sr.
DE	94	Osa Igbinosun	6-1	259	Sr.
LB	19	**Ben Ingle***	6-0	230	Sr.
LB	2	**Zack Ryan***	5-10	224	Sr.
LB	37	**Aaron Taylor***	5-11	206	Sr.
CB	32	Roy Denson	6-0	180	So.
CB	33	**Tyree Holder***	6-0	166	Sr.
SS	43	Dedrick Cromartie	5-10	180	So.
FS	43	Martez Hester	6-2	202	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	31	Alex Egan	5-10	211	Sr.
P	12	**Kyle Schmidt***	6-2	223	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	VMI
Sept. 12	at Texas A&M
Sept. 19	at Eastern Michigan
Sept. 26	at Northwestern
Oct. 3	TOLEDO
Oct. 10	at Northern Illinois
Oct. 17	GEORGIA STATE
Oct. 24	CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Oct. 31	MASSACHUSETTS
Nov. 5	at Western Michigan
Nov. 17	at Ohio
Nov. 24	BOWLING GREEN

2014 RESULTS

W	COLGATE	30-10
L	at Iowa	13-17
L	INDIANA STATE	20-27
L	at Toledo	23-34
L	at Army	24-33
L	WESTERN MICHIGAN	38-42
W	at Central Michigan	32-29
W	AKRON	35-21
L	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	21-35
L	at Massachusetts	10-24
W	EASTERN MICHIGAN	45-30
W	at Bowling Green	41-24

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	27.7	T-71
Rushing	153.4	76
Passing	215.8	78
Total	369.3	92
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.2	67
Rushing	191.1	88
Passing	237.8	82
Total	428.8	86
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 9	+ 0.75	16

MIAMI (OHIO) | REDHAWKS

MAC rank: 12 | Record: 2-10 | MAC record: 2-6 (6th, East) | Stadium: Yager Stadium (24,286)

RANKING 121

REDHAWKS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Miami, Ohio
COACH: Chuck Martin — At Miami (Ohio): 2-10, 1 year; overall: 76-17, 7 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: George Barnett, Eric Koehler
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Matt Pawlowski

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2010
LAST BOWL: 2010, GoDaddy.com
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 4 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Drew Kummer, QB Gus Ragland, OL Trevan Brown, OL Collin Buchanan, DL Bryson Albright, CB Heath Harding, LB Kent Kern

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Martin seems to be the right man to restore pride back in one of the proudest programs in the conference. A strong recruiting class brings optimism for the future. The defense is returning eight starters, including the entire front four.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: There's no clear-cut favorite starter or experience at quarterback. The top three wide receivers need to be replaced. There's talent but also hardly any experience returning at running back. Combine all that with a rebuilt and young offensive line, and the RedHawks have some issues on offense.

ROKEEM WILLIAMS
Photo by Mike DiNovo-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

The spring battle at quarterback was one of the central stories for an offense looking to continue the momentum from last season.

Head coach Chuck Martin's first season was cushioned by the arrival of Notre Dame transfer Andrew Hendrix, who had a successful one-year stint. His graduation leaves a big void for an offense with just four returning starters.

Fifth-year senior Drew Kummer and redshirt freshman Gus Ragland are expected to battle for the starting quarterback job, although true freshman Billy Bahl is an intriguing prospect. Kummer attempted just 58 passes over the last two seasons.

An inexperienced line, aside from Collin Buchanan and Trevan Brown, is a major concern, especially with an unproven quarterback set to take the reins.

"We have some issues, but that's part of the building process," Martin said. "We're still a few years away."

An infusion of new faces at running back brings a level of excitement and uncertainty. Alonzo Smith and Kenny Young redshirted last season but get the first crack at becoming the primary ball-carrier. Don't count out tailback Spencer McInnis, however.

Even after losing All-MAC standout David Frazier, there are plenty of talented options available at wide receiver. Jared Murphy and Rokeem Williams are the most experienced of the bunch.

DEFENSE

The return of eight starters on defense is one of the bright spots entering fall camp. The RedHawks' front seven is particularly filled with experienced players, but even Martin cautioned, experience doesn't equal improvement.

All four starters on the defensive line return, led by defensive ends Bryson Albright (six sacks) and J'Terius Jones (five sacks). Linebacker Kent Kern missed the final three games of last season and spring practice with an injury, but he was a second-team All-MAC selection in 2013. Joe Donlan was moved from middle linebacker to the weakside.

"We had a ridiculously great recruiting class. Imagine how good it will be when we start winning games."
— Chuck Martin

The RedHawks lost the MAC Defensive Player of the Year — cornerback Quinten Rollins — to graduation. Cornerback Marshall Taylor is showing promise for a breakout season. Heath Harding had 98 tackles last season but was moved from cornerback to safety.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Kaleb Patterson is back for his fourth season as Miami's kicker. He connected on 9 of 13 field goal attempts in 2014. Christian Koch averaged 40.1 yards per punt in his first year. Fred McRae, a third-team All-MAC selection, is back at kickoff and punt returns.

OVERVIEW

The RedHawks took a step forward last year despite winning just two games. They lost seven games by 10 points or less. The gap definitely closed. Martin is bringing in a talented recruiting class ranked among the best in the conference, but most of those players won't be ready right away. The strength of the team lies on defense, which can make some games more respectable, but don't be surprised if the RedHawks struggle because of the lack of experience and established playmakers on offense.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Kenny Young: A redshirt freshman, Young has the potential to make a big impact. Young (5-10, 192) is stocky but has sprinter's speed and has already shown an ability to catch passes out of the backfield.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	8	Drew Kummer	6-3	207	Sr.
RB	20	Spencer McInnis	5-9	196	Jr.
WR	18	Fred McRae IV	5-10	178	Jr.
WR	**83**	**Sam Martin***	**6-3**	**189**	**So.**
WR	**6**	**Rokeem Williams***	**6-1**	**204**	**Jr.**
TE	82	Ryan Smith	6-4	258	So.
LT	57	Zach Hovey	6-5	247	So.
LG	**65**	**Trevan Brown***	**6-4**	**307**	**Sr.**
C	73	Brandyn Cook	6-3	303	Sr.
RG	61	Zach Swarts	6-5	270	Fr.
RT	**72**	**Collin Buchanan***	**6-5**	**313**	**Jr.**
DEFENSE					
DE	**91**	**J'Terius Jones***	**6-3**	**245**	**Jr.**
DT	**58**	**Jimmy Rousher***	**6-2**	**288**	**Jr.**
NG	**99**	**Mitch Winters***	**6-5**	**285**	**Sr.**
DE	**95**	**Bryson Albright***	**6-5**	**243**	**Sr.**
LB	49	TJ Williams	6-0	223	Jr.
LB	**43**	**Kent Kern***	**6-1**	**238**	**Sr.**
LB	**46**	**Joe Donlan***	**6-0**	**228**	**Sr.**
CB	**21**	**Marshall Taylor***	**6-3**	**199**	**Jr.**
CB	**24**	**Heath Harding***	**5-10**	**182**	**Jr.**
SS	11	Tony Reid	6-1	194	So.
FS	30	Buchi Okafor	6-1	200	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	**13**	**Kaleb Patterson***	**5-10**	**170**	**Sr.**
P	**39**	**Christian Koch***	**6-0**	**180**	**Sr.**

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	PRESBYTERIAN
Sept. 12	at Wisconsin
Sept. 19	CINCINNATI
Sept. 26	at Western Kentucky
Oct. 3	at Kent State
Oct. 10	at Ohio
Oct. 17	NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Oct. 24	at Western Michigan
Oct. 29	BUFFALO
Nov. 7	EASTERN MICHIGAN
Nov. 14	AKRON
Nov. 21	at Massachusetts

2014 RESULTS

L	MARSHALL	27-42
L	EASTERN KENTUCKY	10-17
L	at Michigan	10-34
L	at Cincinnati	24-31
L	at Buffalo	27-35
W	MASSACHUSETTS	42-41
L	at Akron	19-29
L	at Northern Illinois	41-51
W	KENT STATE	10-3
L	WESTERN MICHIGAN	10-41
L	at Central Michigan	27-34
L	OHIO	21-24

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	22.3	103
Rushing	97.6	119
Passing	277.8	29
Total	375.3	T-85
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	31.8	98
Rushing	199.9	95
Passing	243.3	79
Total	434.3	94
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 2	+ 0.17	51

EASTERN MICHIGAN | EAGLES

MAC rank: 13 Record: 2-10 MAC record: 1-7 (6th, West) Stadium: Rynearson Stadium (30,200)

RANKING 125

EAGLES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Ypsilanti, Mich.
COACH: Chris Creighton — At Eastern Michigan: 2-10, 1 year; overall: 141-56, 18 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kalen DeBoer
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brad McCaslin

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1987
LAST BOWL: 1987, California Bowl
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 4 offense, 7 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Reginald Bell, QB Brogan Roback, RB Darius Jackson, WR Dustin Creel, DE Pat O'Connor, DE Jeremiah Harris, LB Great Ibe, LB Ike Spearman

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Creighton has won at every spot in his long coaching career. A full offseason with his system in place, combined with some much-needed continuity, is a step in the right direction. Bell is a dangerous two-way threat, and his play should improve after an up-and-down freshman season.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Eagles are battling the stigma of being one of the worst FBS programs in the country over the last decade. A slow start is something to watch. The Eagles lack adequate experience on the offensive line, and their secondary could be susceptible to big plays.

REGINALD BELL Jr.
Photo by Kim Klement-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Despite straying from his goal of a 50-50 balance between the run and pass in his first year, coach Chris Creighton might have the right mixture of experience, depth and talent to accomplish that goal this season.

In 2014, the Eagles ran the ball 459 times and passed 320 times, but the emergence of talented quarterback Reginald Bell Jr. played a factor in the increased emphasis on running. Bell established himself in the final six games, finishing as the team's leading rusher with 562 yards.

Bell, a sophomore, showed flashes of his big-play ability, both via the run and pass. He threw for 409 yards and three touchdowns against Ball State, and finished with three 100-yard rushing games.

His running, improved passing and better command of the offense allowed him to beat out talented four-star recruit Brogan Roback in the spring.

The Eagles have a surplus of quality running backs to take pressure of Bell. Senior Darius Jackson, freshman Shaq Vann and junior Juwan Lewis all figure to take on a more prominent role.

The absence of a top-tier wide receiver is a problem, but a talented group, led by Dustin Creel, Cole Gardner, Kris Strange and Indiana transfer Kevin Davis, might be an adequate solution.

The fate of the offense, though, could rest largely on a dangerously inexperienced offensive line. Three key starters have to be replaced, with a heavy burden being placed on underclassmen.

DEFENSE

The good news is that the Eagles return seven starters. The bad news is that the Eagles couldn't stop anybody and rarely forced turnovers in 2014. Defensive end Pat O'Connor and tackle Jeremiah Harris and nose tackle Mike Brown are back, but depth along the defensive line is thin.

Eastern Michigan should be solid at linebacker with Ike Spearman, the leading tackler in 2013, back after missing all of last season with an injury. Senior Great Ibe is a solid player, while sophomore Derric Williams is a player to watch. The secondary has some potential with cornerbacks DaQuan Pace, Ray Tillman and safety Jason Beck, though inexperience could be a problem.

> "Despite our record, we have bonded as a team and they've accepted us and doing things our way."
> — Chris Creighton

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Dylan Mulder made the most of limited opportunities, converting on 8 of 12 field goal attempts last season. Sophomore Austin Barnes was one of the bright spots, averaging 44.6 yards in 22 punts. Freshman Shaq Vann headlines the kick-return game.

OVERVIEW

Creighton is emphasizing the importance of continuity in all three phases in hopes that it will translate to improved play on the field. The Eagles have a good grasp of Creighton's values and his system, and they should benefit from a solid influx of redshirt freshmen to help with depth. Eastern Michigan has upgraded its talent at quarterback and running back, but the inexperience along the offensive line is dangerous for a program without a winning season since 1995.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Kevin Davis: After sitting out two of the past three seasons, the Indiana transfer is poised to make a difference at a position of need for the Eagles. Davis (5-11, 186) can help a depleted unit with his speed and play-making ability.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	10	**Reginald Bell Jr.***	6-3	187	So.
RB	6	Darius Jackson	6-0	216	Sr.
WR	81	Kevin Davis	5-11	186	Jr.
WR	3	**Dustin Creel***	6-2	203	Sr.
WR	8	**Kris Strange***	5-11	182	Sr.
TE	84	Cole Gardner	6-5	252	Jr.
LT	62	Ka'John Armstrong	6-4	280	Fr.
LG	57	Jeremy Hickey	6-4	307	Fr.
C	50	Jake Hurcombe	6-1	295	Jr.
RG	70	Matt Thornton	6-4	301	Jr.
RT	72	**Andrew Wylie***	6-6	312	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	52	**Pat O'Connor***	6-4	257	Sr.
DT	90	Jeremiah Harris	6-5	243	So.
NG	96	**Mike Brown***	6-2	280	Jr.
LB	30	Aaron Abbott	6-0	197	So.
LB	43	**Anthony Zappone***	6-2	239	Jr.
LB	10	**Great Ibe***	6-0	213	Sr.
LB	44	**Hunter Matt***	6-0	230	Sr.
CB	31	Ray Tillman	5-11	192	Sr.
CB	33	**DaQuan Pace***	5-10	161	Jr.
SS	35	Brandon Bossard	6-2	206	So.
FS	39	**Jason Beck***	6-1	197	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	38	**Dylan Mulder***	6-0	189	Sr.
P	17	Austin Barnes	5-11	207	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	OLD DOMINION
Sept. 12	at Wyoming
Sept. 19	BALL STATE
Sept. 26	ARMY
Oct. 3	at LSU
Oct. 10	AKRON
Oct. 17	at Toledo
Oct. 24	at Northern Illinois
Oct. 29	WESTERN MICHIGAN
Nov. 7	at Miami (OH)
Nov. 14	MASSACHUSETTS
Nov. 27	at Central Michigan

2014 RESULTS

W	MORGAN STATE	31-28
L	at Florida	0-65
L	at Old Dominion	3-17
L	at Michigan State	14-73
L	at Akron	6-31
W	BUFFALO	37-27
L	at Massachusetts	14-36
L	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	17-28
L	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	7-38
L	at Western Michigan	7-51
L	at Ball State	30-45
L	TOLEDO	16-52

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	15.2	123
Rushing	137.8	96
Passing	151.8	115
Total	289.6	121
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	40.9	122
Rushing	223.9	113
Passing	274.8	116
Total	498.8	118
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 18	- 1.5	124

2014 NCAA LEADERS

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

PASS EFFICIENCY	G	ATT	COM	INT	YDS	TDS	EFFI.
1. Marcus Mariota, Oregon	15	445	304	4	4454	42	181.7
2. J.T. Barrett, Ohio State	12	314	203	10	2834	34	169.8
3. Brandon Doughty, Western Kentucky	13	552	375	10	4830	49	167.1
4. Cody Kessler, Southern California	13	452	315	5	3826	39	167.1
5. Garrett Grayson, Colorado State	13	420	270	7	4006	32	166.2
6. Zach Terrell, Western Michigan	13	368	250	10	3443	26	164.4
7. Blake Sims, Alabama	14	391	252	10	3487	28	157.9
8. Bryce Petty, Baylor	12	428	270	7	3855	29	157.8
9. Grant Hedrick, Boise State	14	415	294	14	3696	23	157.2
10. Hutson Mason, Georgia	13	277	188	4	2168	21	155.7

INTERCEPTIONS	G	INT	YDS	INT/GM
1. Gerod Holliman, Louisville	13	14	245	1.1
2. Senquez Golson, Ole Miss	13	10	162	.8
3. Quinten Rollins, Miami (OH)	12	7	35	.6
4. Jacoby Glenn, UCF	13	7	29	.5
- Chris Hackett, TCU	13	7	131	.5
- Darian Thompson, Boise State	13	7	53	.5
7. Kevin Byard, Middle Tennessee	12	6	1	.5
- Donte Deayon, Boise State	12	6	70	.5
- Montres Kitchens, Troy	12	6	80	.5
- Parry Nickerson, Tulane	12	6	24	.5
- Frankie Sutera, Utah State	14	7	96	.5

RUSHING	G	ATT	YDS	TDS	YPG
1. Melvin Gordon, Wisconsin	14	343	2587	29	184.8
2. Tevin Coleman, Indiana	12	270	2036	15	169.7
3. Kareem Hunt, Toledo	10	205	1631	16	163.1
4. Donnel Pumphrey, San Diego State	13	276	1867	20	143.6
5. Devon Johnson, Marshall	13	206	1767	17	135.9
6. James Conner, Pittsburgh	13	298	1765	26	135.8
7. Jordan Howard, UAB	12	306	1587	13	132.3
8. Samaje Perine, Oklahoma	13	263	1713	21	131.8
9. Jay Ajayi, Boise State	14	347	1823	28	130.2
10. Anthone Taylor, Buffalo	11	282	1403	12	127.5

SCORING	G	TDS	PAT	2PT	FG	PTS	PPG
1. Jay Ajayi, Boise State	14	32	0	0	0	192	13.7
- Melvin Gordon, Wisconsin	14	32	0	0	0	192	13.7
3. Keenan Reynolds, Navy	11	23	0	0	0	138	12.5
4. James Conner, Pittsburgh	13	26	0	0	0	156	12.0
- Kenneth Dixon, Louisiana Tech	14	28	0	0	0	168	12.0
6. Jarvion Franklin, Western Michigan	13	25	0	0	0	150	11.5
7. Jaden Oberkrom, TCU	13	0	76	0	22	142	10.9
8. Josh Lambert, West Virginia	13	0	45	0	30	135	10.4
9. Ameer Abdullah, Nebraska	13	22	0	0	0	132	10.2
- Jeremy Langford, Michigan State	13	22	0	0	0	132	10.2

TOTAL OFFENSE	G	PLAYS	YDS	YPG
1. Connor Halliday, Washington State	9	555	3742	415.8
2. Shane Carden, East Carolina	13	713	4812	370.2
3. Brandon Doughty, Western Kentucky	13	591	4778	367.5
4. Trevone Boykin, TCU	13	644	4608	354.5
5. Marcus Mariota, Oregon	15	580	5224	348.3
6. Dak Prescott, Mississippi State	13	606	4435	341.2
7. Bryce Petty, Baylor	12	512	3956	329.7
8. Jared Goff, California	12	564	3929	327.4
9. Blake Frohnapfel, Massachusetts	10	478	3261	326.1
10. J.T. Barrett, Ohio State	12	485	3772	314.3

PUNTING	G	PUNTS	YDS	AVG
1. JK Scott, Alabama	13	55	2640	48.0
2. Austin Rehkow, Idaho	11	44	2101	47.8
3. Tom Hackett, Utah	13	80	3736	46.7
4. Drew Riggleman, Arizona	14	76	3501	46.1
5. Dalton Schomp, Florida Atlantic	12	50	2272	45.4
6. Wil Baumann, North Carolina State	13	60	2724	45.4
7. Peter Mortell, Minnesota	13	67	3025	45.1
8. Scott Arellano, BYU	13	69	3106	45.0
9. Jamie Keehn, LSU	13	71	3189	44.9
10. Mattias Ciabatti, South Florida	12	65	2888	44.4

RECEIVING	G	REC	YDS	TDS	YDSPG
1. Rashard Higgins, Colorado State	12	96	1750	17	145.8
2. Vince Mayle, Washington State	12	106	1483	9	123.6
3. Amari Cooper, Alabama	14	124	1727	16	123.4
4. Corey Davis, Western Michigan	12	78	1408	15	117.3
5. Tyler Lockett, Kansas State	13	106	1515	11	116.5
6. Justin Hardy, East Carolina	13	121	1494	10	114.9
7. Corey Coleman, Baylor	10	64	1119	11	111.9
8. Kevin White, West Virginia	13	109	1447	10	111.3
9. Tajae Sharpe, Massachusetts	12	85	1281	7	106.8
10. Joshua McCain, Idaho	11	76	1162	9	105.6

TEAM STATISTICS

TOTAL OFFENSE	G	PLAYS	YDS	AVG	TDS	YPG
1. Baylor	13	1138	7559	6.64	82	581.5
2. Marshall	14	1032	7829	7.59	84	559.2
3. Oregon	15	1118	8205	7.34	90	547.0
4. Western Kentucky	13	986	6950	7.05	76	534.6
5. East Carolina	13	1070	6929	6.48	61	533.0
- TCU	13	1038	6929	6.68	77	533.0
7. Washington State	12	1014	6210	6.12	50	517.5
8. Mississippi State	13	1001	6679	6.67	64	513.8
9. Ohio State	15	1099	7674	6.98	90	511.6
10. Texas Tech	12	914	6049	6.62	49	504.1

TOTAL DEFENSE	G	PLAYS	YDS	AVG	TDS	YPG
1. Clemson	13	841	3390	4.03	27	260.8
2. Penn State	13	849	3623	4.27	27	278.7
3. Stanford	13	873	3671	4.21	26	282.4
4. Wisconsin	14	839	4117	4.91	35	294.1
5. UCF	13	869	3881	4.47	29	298.5
6. Louisville	13	845	4011	4.75	31	308.5
7. Michigan	12	783	3736	4.77	31	311.3
8. Michigan State	13	807	4105	5.09	36	315.8
9. LSU	13	845	4119	4.87	27	316.8
10. Arkansas	13	821	4204	5.12	33	323.4

KICKOFF RETURNS	G	RET	YDS	TDS	AVG
1. UAB	12	47	1323	4	28.15
2. LSU	13	26	695	1	26.73
3. UCF	13	36	957	1	26.58
4. Boston College	13	35	910	1	26.00
5. Arkansas	13	24	617	1	25.71
6. Maryland	13	42	1073	1	25.55
7. Virginia	12	35	885	0	25.29
8. Duke	13	36	909	1	25.25
9. Missouri	14	26	641	2	24.65
10. Marshall	14	44	1083	1	24.61

SCORING OFFENSE	G	TDS	PAT	2PT	FG	SAF	PTS	AVG
1. Baylor	13	82	81	0	18	0	627	48.2
2. TCU	13	77	76	0	22	0	604	46.5
3. Marshall	14	84	83	0	17	0	638	45.6
4. Oregon	15	90	79	4	18	0	681	45.4
5. Ohio State	15	90	89	1	13	1	672	44.8
6. Western Kentucky	13	76	71	1	16	0	577	44.4
7. Michigan State	13	74	73	0	14	0	559	43.0
8. Georgia	13	70	67	1	16	0	537	41.3
9. Boise State	14	73	68	0	16	1	556	39.7
10. California	12	61	56	1	11	1	459	38.3

SCORING DEFENSE	G	TDS	KXP	2PT	FG	SF	PTS	AVG
1. Ole Miss	13	24	23	0	13	1	208	16.0
2. Stanford	13	26	24	0	11	0	213	16.4
3. Clemson	13	27	22	0	11	0	217	16.7
4. Temple	12	24	24	0	14	0	210	17.5
5. LSU	13	27	27	0	13	0	228	17.5
6. Alabama	14	27	23	2	23	0	258	18.4
7. Penn State	13	27	24	0	18	1	242	18.6
8. TCU	13	28	26	0	17	0	247	19.0
9. UCF	13	29	27	0	16	0	249	19.2
10. Arkansas	13	33	32	1	6	0	250	19.2

PUNT RETURNS	G	RET	YDS	TDS	AVG
1. Stanford	13	22	403	2	18.32
2. FIU	12	21	382	1	18.19
3. Kansas State	13	24	432	2	18.00
4. Auburn	13	17	303	2	17.82
5. Nebraska	13	39	620	3	15.90
6. Northwestern	12	9	136	1	15.11
7. Purdue	12	16	237	0	14.81
8. FAU	12	23	332	1	14.43
9. Utah	13	28	386	3	13.79
10. Duke	13	24	325	2	13.54

RUSHING OFFENSE	G	RUSH	NET	AVG	TDS	YPG
1. Georgia Tech	14	790	4789	6.06	47	342.1
2. Navy	13	727	4395	6.05	45	338.1
3. Wisconsin	14	648	4482	6.92	46	320.1
4. New Mexico	12	586	3725	6.36	34	310.4
5. Army West Point	12	665	3558	5.35	33	296.5
6. Air Force	13	796	3550	4.46	34	273.1
7. Marshall	14	559	3807	6.81	40	271.9
8. Ohio State	15	690	3967	5.75	41	264.5
9. Indiana	12	539	3163	5.87	29	263.6
10. Oklahoma	13	557	3395	6.10	40	261.2

RUSHING DEFENSE	G	ATT	NET	AVG	TDS	YPG
1. Michigan State	13	363	1150	3.17	18	88.5
2. Boston College	13	399	1228	3.08	14	94.5
3. Penn State	13	443	1306	2.95	14	100.5
4. Alabama	14	452	1434	3.17	5	102.4
5. Clemson	13	453	1344	2.97	11	103.4
6. UCF	13	428	1356	3.17	10	104.3
7. Stanford	13	443	1358	3.07	12	104.5
8. Oklahoma	13	458	1383	3.02	15	106.4
9. TCU	13	508	1414	2.78	9	108.8
10. Louisville	13	435	1416	3.26	12	108.9

PUNTING	G	YDS	RET YDS	PUNTS	TB	NET YDS
1. Alabama	14	2640	83	55	5	44.67
2. Idaho	11	2101	129	44	3	43.45
3. Utah	13	3736	121	80	10	42.69
4. Wake Forest	12	3535	89	81	0	42.54
5. Ohio State	15	2164	58	48	5	41.79
6. Ole Miss	13	2943	66	68	2	41.72
7. LSU	13	3189	192	71	3	41.37
8. Baylor	13	2040	56	47	2	41.36
9. Texas State	12	2844	82	65	4	41.26
10. BYU	13	3106	224	69	2	41.19

PASS OFFENSE	G	ATT	COM	INT	YDS	AVG	TDS	YPG
1. Washington State	12	771	510	18	5732	7.43	45	477.7
2. Western Kentucky	13	557	378	10	4866	8.74	49	374.3
3. East Carolina	13	637	402	11	4835	7.59	31	371.9
4. Baylor	13	519	323	8	4757	9.17	38	365.9
5. Texas Tech	12	559	332	18	4213	7.54	40	351.1
6. California	12	535	329	10	4152	7.76	37	346.0
7. TCU	13	529	325	11	4240	8.02	37	326.2
8. Colorado State	13	447	286	7	4181	9.35	34	321.6
9. West Virginia	13	534	340	10	4121	7.72	26	317.0
10. Oregon	15	474	326	4	4687	9.89	44	312.5

PASSING DEFENSE	G	COMP	ATT	YDS	TDS	YDS/ATT	YPG
1. San Jose State	12	134	241	1414	6	5.87	117.8
2. Clemson	13	194	388	2046	12	5.27	157.4
3. LSU	13	199	385	2134	10	5.54	164.2
4. Wisconsin	14	170	347	2352	15	6.78	168.0
5. Georgia	13	204	379	2215	13	5.84	170.4
6. New Mexico State	12	187	299	2094	16	7.00	174.5
7. Iowa	13	189	352	2287	18	6.50	175.9
8. Stanford	13	245	430	2313	12	5.38	177.9
9. Penn State	13	215	406	2317	10	5.71	178.2
10. San Diego State	13	198	355	2321	10	6.54	178.5

TURNOVERS	G	+FUM	+INT	+TOT	-FUM	-INT	-TOT	MAR
1. Oregon	15	21	13	34	7	4	11	23
2. Michigan State	13	16	18	34	6	9	15	19
3. TCU	13	14	26	40	11	11	22	18
4. Georgia	13	13	16	29	7	6	13	16
5. Louisiana Tech	14	16	26	42	13	13	26	16
6. Arizona State	13	13	14	27	4	9	13	14
7. Baylor	13	13	13	26	5	8	13	13
8. FIU	12	19	14	33	12	10	22	11
9. Northern Illinois	14	10	14	24	9	3	12	12
- Washington	14	16	13	29	11	6	17	12

PICKING THE MW

Broncos Favored Again as New QBs Take Over League

Ask any Mountain West coach where the next great Mountain West quarterback is located, and the answer is a resounding shrug.

The proven commodities, and not coincidentally the MW's last four MVPs, reside in the NFL. Colorado State's Garrett Grayson, the third quarterback taken last spring is apprenticing under Drew Brees in New Orleans. Fresno State's Derek Carr started as a rookie for Oakland. Boise State's Kellen Moore has stuck as a free agent in Detroit. Andy Dalton of ex-MW member TCU makes seriously big bucks in Cincinnati.

But beyond Utah State's Chuckie Keeton (a superb athlete coming off two seasons of dire knee injuries), there is little-to-no QB name recognition outside each school's most die-hard following.

"We have great quarterbacks in this conference. You just don't know about them," said Boise State coach Bryan Harsin, not revealing his own hand until he sees the result of summer dedication.

"No one knows about them until they have actually done something. I know from recruiting against these schools who they have. They just haven't had their opportunities yet."

Boise State, even in a restocking year at quarterback, is full of proven talent elsewhere, including nearly intact lines on both sides of the ball. The Broncos expect to make another run at a Big Six bowl.

In the West Division, San Diego State's Rocky Long sees an anomaly for 2015. "It's unusual we don't have a returning all-conference quarterback from a year before," said the dean of MW coaches, who previously turned another basketball school, New Mexico, into a contender.

"Usually you pick a favorite by who has a quarterback coming back. I don't think anyone is established except Utah State and who knows how (Keeton) will come back from his knee. You go by reputation and history. If you go back in history, it's us and Fresno State. On the other side, it's Utah State and Boise State. The league is as wide open as it has been."

The MW, like many leagues, features a blend of spread and pro set offenses — and some hybrid "multiple formations." With high schools primarily turning out spread quarterbacks, Long said: "In recruiting, there are people making mistakes all over the place."

Quarterbacks are the quickest to seek FieldTurf that is greener (or Boise State blue) on the other side of the street. The MW also attracts second-chancers. Three Power 5 conference exports could start: San Diego State's Maxwell Smith (via Kentucky), Hawaii's Max Wittek (USC) and Wyoming's Cameron Coffman (Indiana).

In any case, the initials of the most popular QB in the league was "TBA" with many battles likely stretching deep into camp.

Maybe the fans don't like the suspense, but Harsin makes no apologies. "Summer is still about competing."

— Natalie Meisler

CONFERENCE PICKS

WEST DIVISION	Good news	Bad news	Our call
1. San Diego State	RB Donnel Pumphrey is ready to carry Aztecs in open West race.	Aztecs are one of those teams with an undecided QB derby.	SDSU has a proven formula: Win with defense and the running game.
2. Fresno State	FSU traditionally packs roster with some of MW's best skill position athletes.	Tradition alone won't win in a rebuilding year.	Bulldogs will be hard-pressed to three-peat division crown..
3. San Jose State	Breakout recruiting year made a dent in some Pac-12 wish lists.	The future isn't here yet for the Spartans.	Could — should — make some noise in program's third year in MW.
4. UNLV	Blake Decker is the leading returning quarterback in MW.	He will operate behind a raw offensive line.	Bishop Gorman HS coaching legend Tony Sanchez will test his local celebrity status.
5. Nevada	Boise State isn't on the Wolf Pack's schedule this season.	For first time since 2006, the Pack's QB isn't named Kaepernick or Fajardo.	A major rebuilding task awaits Nevada, which will have to take a step back.
6. Hawaii	Hawaii picks up $2 million for scheduling Big Ten adventures.	Rainbow Warriors earn it the hard way by taking lumps at Ohio State, Wisconsin.	Hawaii still trying new things, but it could be Aloha for Norm Chow.
MTN DIVISION			
1. Boise State	There are 19 returning starters from 12-2 Fiesta Bowl champs.	Broncos have to make back-to-back trips to Utah State, Colorado State.	There are continued blue skies overlooking that blue rug.
2. Utah State	Quarterback Chuckie Keeton showed promise of recovery in spring.	The Aggies' offensive line has its share of detractors.	Aggies looking at payback date — Oct. 16 vs. Boise State. Don't sleep on these guys.
3. Colorado State	All-American Rashard Higgins is the flashiest receiver in the West.	For second straight year, a Rams' 1,000-yard RB left early — and wasn't drafted.	Georgia OC Mike Bobo steps in nicely for departed MW Coach of the Year.
4. Air Force	Falcons still soaring from return to Commander-in-Chief status.	But AFA still looking uphill in MW's tougher division.	Weston Steelhammer, Jacobi Owens are AFA's best young talent in years.
5. Wyoming	Cowboys have one of MW's best 1-2 RB punches in Shaun Wick, Brian Hill.	Team faces major rebuilding challenge in the secondary.	Running game will need to give passing game time to develop.
6. New Mexico	Bob Davie has drawn kudos for changing program's culture.	The win-loss ledger has not significantly changed.	The Lobos should have five wins before a brutal November slate.

Lindy's 2015 ALL-MW TEAM

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Chuckie Keeton	Sr.	Utah State
RB	Donnel Pumphrey	Jr.	San Diego State
RB	Marteze Waller	Sr.	Fresno State
WR	Rashard Higgins	Jr.	Colorado State
WR	Devonte Boyd	So.	UNLV
TE	Steven Walker	Sr.	Colorado State
C	Marcus Henry	Sr.	Boise State
OL	Rees Odhiambo	Sr.	Boise State
OL	Ben Clarke	Sr.	Hawaii
OL	Fred Zerblis	Jr.	Colorado State
OL	Darrell Greene	Sr.	San Diego State
AP	JoJo Natson	Sr.	Utah State
PK	Donny Hageman	Sr.	San Diego State

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	Eddie Yarbrough	Sr.	Wyoming
DL	Kamalei Correa	Jr.	Boise State
DL	Alex Hansen	Sr.	Air Force
DL	Ian Seau	Sr.	Nevada
LB	Dakota Cox	Jr.	New Mexico
LB	Kyler Fackrell	Sr.	Utah State
LB	Nick Vigil	Jr.	Utah State
DB	Weston Steelhammer	Jr.	Air Force
DB	Donte Deayon	Sr.	Boise State
DB	Darian Thompson	Sr.	Boise State
DB	J.J. Whittaker	Sr.	San Diego State
P	Alex Boy	Jr.	Nevada

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Blake Decker	Sr.	UNLV
RB	Jacobi Owens	Jr.	Air Force
RB	Jhurell Pressley	Sr.	New Mexico
WR	Tyler Winston	Jr.	San Jose State
WR	Shane Williams-Rhodes	Sr.	Boise State
TE	Jarred Gipson	Jr.	Nevada
C	Bo Bonnheim	Jr.	Fresno State
OL	Matt Rochell	Sr.	Air Force
OL	Alex Fifita	Sr.	Fresno State
OL	Chase Roullier	Jr.	Wyoming
OL	Jake Simonich	Jr.	Utah State
AP	Tyler Ervin	Jr.	San Jose State
PK	Brett Zuzo	Jr.	Nevada

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Joe Kawulok	Sr.	Colorado State
DL	Alex Barrett	Jr.	San Diego State
DL	Jordan Nielsen	Sr.	Utah State
DL	Lenny Jones	Sr.	Nevada
LB	Tanner Vallejo	Jr.	Boise State
LB	Ejiro Ederaine	Sr.	Fresno State
LB	Christian Tago	Jr.	San Jose State
DB	Cleveland Wallace III	Jr.	San Jose State
DB	Trent Matthews	Sr.	Colorado State
DB	Charles Washington	Sr.	Fresno State
DB	Damontae Kazee	Jr.	San Diego State
P	Hayden Hunt	Jr.	Colorado State

THE BIG ONES

Sept. 4	Washington at Boise State
Sept. 12	Minnesota at Colorado State
Sept. 12	Hawaii at Ohio State
Sept. 12	Arizona at Nevada
Sept. 12	UCLA at UNLV
Sept. 19	Utah at Fresno State
Sept. 19	Air Force at Michigan State
Sept. 25	Boise State at Virginia
Oct. 3	San Jose State at Auburn
Oct. 3	Fresno State at San Diego State
Oct. 3	Colorado State at Utah State
Oct. 10	Boise State at Colorado State
Oct. 16	Boise State at Utah State
Nov. 27	Boise State at San Jose State
Nov. 28	BYU at Utah State

BOWL CONNECTIONS

MWC champ can participate in a Big Six Bowl if it is highest rated of the so-called Group of 5 conferences (Sun Belt, MAC, Mountain West, American Athletic, Conference USA).

MW No.1
Las Vegas Bowl vs. Pac-12
MW No. 2
Poinsettia Bowl vs. Army or AAC
MW
New Mexico vs. C-USA
MW
Hawaii Bowl vs. C-USA or AAC
MW
Famous Idaho Potato vs. MAC
MW
Arizona Bowl vs. C-USA

TOP 10 NFL TALENT

1.	Rashard Higgins	WR	Jr.	Colorado State	First-rounder in preliminary mock drafts.
2.	Donnel Pumphrey	RB	Jr.	San Diego State	Undersized (5-9), but a third-down game breaker.
3.	Eddie Yarbrough	DE	Sr.	Wyoming	Can project at outside linebacker.
4.	Kyler Fackrell	LB	Sr.	Utah State	Was projected high before ACL tear.
5.	Ian Seau	DE	Sr.	Nevada	Nephew of iconic Hall of Famer.
6.	Marcus Henry	C	Sr.	Boise State	NFL loves those Boise State O-linemen.
7.	J.J. Whittaker	CB	Sr.	San Diego State	Lockdown corner has the tools.
8.	Ejiro Ederaine	LB	Sr.	Fresno State	The NFL loves pass-rushing specialists.
9.	Max Wittek	QB	Sr.	Hawaii	NFL follows USC pedigree.
10.	Chuckie Keeton	QB	Sr.	Utah State	Will knee heal sufficiently to take a flyer?

Most Valuable Player	Offensive Player of the Year	Defensive Player of the Year	Newcomer of the Year
Donnel Pumphrey RB, San Diego State	Rashard Higgins WR, Colorado State	Donte Deayon DB, Boise State	Cameron Coffman QB, Wyoming

HONOR ROLL

Most Accurate Passer	**Chuckie Keeton**	**Utah State**
Strongest Arm	**Chuckie Keeton**	**Utah State**
Best Scrambler	**Blake Decker**	**UNLV**
Coolest in the Clutch	**Chuckie Keeton**	**Utah State**
Toughest to Bring Down	**Marteze Waller**	**Fresno State**
Best Hands	**Devonte Boyd**	**UNLV**
Most Dangerous Deep Threat	**Rashard Higgins**	**Colorado State**
Best Pass Blocker	**Rees Odhiambo**	**Boise State**
Best Run Blocker	**Darrell Greene**	**San Diego State**
Best Pass Rusher	**Kamalei Correa**	**Boise State**
Best Cover Corner	**Donte Deayon**	**Boise State**
Special Teams Demon	**Darren Lee**	**Boise State**

BOISE STATE | BRONCOS

MW rank: 1 Record: 12-2 MW record: 7-1 (1st, Mountain) Stadium: Bronco Stadium (36,387)

RANKING 22

BRONCOS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho
COACH: Bryan Harsin — At Boise State: 12-2, 1 year; overall: 19-7, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Eliah Drinkwitz
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Marcel Yates

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2001
RETURNING STARTERS: 18; 9 offense, 8 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: WR Thomas Sperbeck, WR Chaz Anderson, WR Shane Williams-Rhodes, TE Jake Roh, DE Kamalei Correa, LB Tanner Vallejo, CB Donte Deayon, S Darian Thompson

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Broncos return their entire offensive line, three starting wide receivers and the starting tight end. Four returning receivers combined for 175 of the team's 310 catches last season. The defensive line is loaded with talented veterans and all four defensive stars return — Correa, Vallejo, Deayon and Thompson.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The two starters lost on offense accounted for nearly all of the offense — quarterback Grant Hedrick and tailback Jay Ajayi — and the program doesn't have an experienced option to replace either. Depth is a concern at wide receiver and defensive back, but the starting units could be the best in the Mountain West.

KAMALEI CORREA
Photo by Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Outgoing quarterback Grant Hedrick and tailback Jay Ajayi accounted for 89.1 percent of the Broncos' yards and 92.4 percent of their offensive touchdowns last year. The Broncos don't have ready-made replacements for either.

Sophomore Ryan Finley, who made one extended appearance as the backup last year, led the quarterbacks in the spring. Sophomore Jeremy McNichols is the favorite at tailback, but he missed most of spring ball after hernia surgery. Good news: The other nine starters return.

The line features All-Mountain West center Marcus Henry and talented left tackle Rees Odhiambo. The group has only one proven backup, however.

It's a similar story at wide receiver, where the three starters return without a proven backup. Senior Shane Williams-Rhodes, a 5-6 slot receiver, ranks fifth in school history with 170 catches. Junior Chaz Anderson, a converted cornerback, made six catches of at least 46 yards last year. And junior Thomas Sperbeck, the offensive MVP of the Fiesta Bowl, emerged as the Broncos' next star receiver with a team-high 877 yards.

A deep tight end corps adds to the passing game. Sophomore Jake Roh, who is more receiver than blocker right now, led the group with 35 catches last year.

DEFENSE

The defensive line returns Mountain West sack leader Kamalei Correa at stud end, starting tackle Sam McCaskill and starting nose tackle Armand Nance. Three seniors who redshirted last year will compete for starting spots — end/tackle Tyler Horn, nose tackle Justin Taimatuia and tackle Tutulupeatau Mataele.

The linebacker crew is loaded, too. Junior Tanner Vallejo led the team in tackles last season, and junior Ben Weaver was tops in 2013. Their backups are senior Tyler Gray, an excellent coverage linebacker, and sophomore Joe Martarano, who emerged as a key contributor late last season.

The secondary features seniors Darian Thompson (safety) and Donte Deayon (cornerback), who have combined for 27 career interceptions. Junior Jonathan Moxey is another returning starter at cornerback and was much-improved in spring ball.

Two spots remain in flux — nickel, where senior Mercy Maston and sophomore transfer Kam Miles are competing, and the other safety job, where junior Chanceller James will return from a torn ACL to compete with sophomore Dylan Sumner-Gardner.

> "The one humbling thing that we can always show is the film. We won games, but we didn't win them as well as we would have liked."
>
> — Bryan Harsin

SPECIAL TEAMS

Junior Tyler Rausa replaces Dan Goodale as the kicker after a two-year wait as a backup. The rest of the specialists remain in place, including punter Sean Wale, who averaged 49.5 yards on eight kicks in the Fiesta Bowl, and kick returners Deayon, Williams-Rhodes and McNichols.

OVERVIEW

The Broncos will enter the season in *Lindy's* Top 25 and as the leading contender for the Group of Five berth in a College Football Playoff bowl. If injuries or complacency don't get them, it's difficult to imagine this team winning fewer than 10 games against a schedule that features just five bowl teams from last year.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Tutulupeatau Mataele: The junior college transfer was supposed to make his debut in 2013, but he wasn't in school that fall and was suspended by the NCAA for 2014 because of an academic issue tied to his junior college record. He was the Broncos' top defensive scout player in 2014 and has participated in three spring practices with Boise State.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	15	Ryan Finley	6-4	199	So.
RB	13	Jeremy McNichols	5-9	198	So.
WR	82	**Thomas Sperbeck***	6-0	176	Jr.
WR	1	**Shane Williams-Rhodes***	5-6	168	Sr.
WR	6	**Chaz Anderson***	5-10	181	Jr.
TE	88	**Jake Roh***	6-3	219	So.
LT	71	**Rees Odhiambo***	6-4	303	Sr.
LG	73	**Travis Averill***	6-3	302	Jr.
C	72	**Marcus Henry***	6-3	296	Sr.
RG	66	**Mario Yakoo***	6-4	327	Jr.
RT	70	**Steven Baggett***	6-3	295	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	69	Tyler Horn	6-5	272	Sr.
DT	40	**Armand Nance***	6-0	311	Sr.
DT	94	**Sam McCaskill***	6-3	255	Jr.
DE	8	**Kamalei Correa***	6-3	244	Jr.
LB	51	**Ben Weaver***	6-0	231	Jr.
LB	20	**Tanner Vallejo***	6-1	226	Jr.
CB	5	**Donte Deayon***	5-9	150	Sr.
CB	30	**Jonathan Moxey***	5-10	187	Jr.
S	9	Mercy Maston	5-11	203	Sr.
S	4	**Darian Thompson***	6-2	210	Sr.
S	29	Dylan Sumner-Gardner	6-1	193	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	49	Tyler Rausa	5-19	195	Jr.
P	19	**Sean Wale***	6-2	185	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	WASHINGTON
Sept. 12	at BYU
Sept. 18	IDAHO STATE
Sept. 25	at Virginia
Oct. 3	HAWAII
Oct. 10	at Colorado State
Oct. 17	at Utah State
Oct. 24	WYOMING
Oct. 31	at UNLV
Nov. 14	NEW MEXICO
Nov. 20	AIR FORCE
Nov. 27	at San Jose State

2014 RESULTS

L	vs. Ole Miss (Atlanta, GA)	13-35
W	COLORADO STATE	37-24
W	at Connecticut	38-21
W	LOUISIANA	34-9
L	at Air Force	14-28
W	at Nevada	51-46
W	FRESNO STATE	37-27
W	BYU	55-30
W	at New Mexico	60-49
W	SAN DIEGO STATE	38-29
W	at Wyoming	63-14
W	UTAH STATE	50-19
	MW Championship Game	
W	vs. Fresno State	28-14
	Fiesta Bowl	
W	vs. Arizona	38-30

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	39.7	9
Rushing	213.9	29
Passing	280.4	23
Total	494.3	14
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	26.8	63
Rushing	142.6	36
Passing	232.9	74
Total	375.4	48
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 9	+ 0.50	30

UTAH STATE | AGGIES

MW rank: 2 Record: 10-4 MW record: 6-2 (T-2nd, Mountain) Stadium: Maverik Stadium (25,513)

RANKING 65

AGGIES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Logan, Utah
COACH: Matt Wells — At USU and overall: 19-9, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Josh Heupel
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kevin Clune

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2013
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2010
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 7 offense, 6 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Chuckie Keeton, WR/PR JoJo Natson, WR Hunter Sharp, C Austin Stephens, RT Jake Simonich, DE Jordan Nielsen, LB Nick Vigil, FS Devin Centers

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Aggies are happy to have Keeton back — especially following the spring departure of Darell Garretson — to work with experienced wide receivers and a veteran line. But Utah State will rely heavily on its defense, particularly its linebacker corps, to carry it back into contention for the Mountain West title.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The health of Keeton, who has missed big chunks of three seasons, is always a concern, and USU's running game wasn't nearly as impressive in 2014 as it had been in previous seasons. The defense won't look quite as formidable if key players don't come back well from serious injuries. Place-kicking is a bit of a concern following the graduation of Nick Diaz.

JOJO NATSON
Photo by Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Bad luck for quarterbacks was Utah State's theme of 2014, with Chuckie Keeton, Darell Garretson and Craig Harrison all being lost to season-ending injuries before true freshman Kent Myers took over the final six games.

Back for a fifth season, Keeton is the starter under new coordinator Josh Heupel. But he played in only three games last season while trying to come back from ACL surgery the year before.

Garretson, who took over in 2013 when Keeton went down and was USU's leading passer last season before breaking his wrist in mid-October, decided to transfer. That leaves a backup battle between Myers (who briefly experimented with playing wide receiver in the spring), Oregon transfer Damion Hobbs, redshirt freshman DJ Nelson and incoming freshman Cade Smith.

Utah State's line boasts five returning starters, and experienced wide receivers are plentiful, including seniors Hunter Sharp, JoJo Natson, Devonte Robinson and Brandon Swindall, who is coming back from a torn Achilles'.

Sophomore LaJuan Hunt is the top returning rusher, while senior Rashad Hall, sophomore Tonny Lindsey and junior college transfer Devante Mays should all be in the backfield mix.

DEFENSE

New coordinator Kevin Clune is a former USU linebackers coach who spent one season as the coordinator at Hawaii, so the Aggies' defensive look should stay about the same in 2015.

Of course, Mountain West Defensive Player of the Year Zach Vigil is gone, but his little brother, Nick, was a first-team all-conference selection last year as a sophomore.

The Aggies are deep at linebacker, which is good considering Nick Vigil's hamstring issues, senior Kyler Fackrell's recovery from ACL surgery and LT Filiaga's torn Achilles'.

But senior Torrey Green was one of the best players on the field during a spring that was dominated by the Utah State defense, and the Aggies also have lots of experience back at cornerback (Jalen Davis, Daniel Gray) and the defensive line (Jordan Nielsen).

> "I'll definitely be able to go full speed with the team in summer workouts."
> — LB Kyle Fackrell, returning from an ACL injury

Replacing safeties Frankie Sutera and Brian Suite is a concern, but junior Devin Centers returns at free safety.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Aggies are looking for a new place-kicker and a new punter following the graduations of Nick Diaz and Jaron Bentrude. Junior Jake Thompson is a strong kickoff specialist, but he missed all four of his field goal attempts last season, leaving the door open for junior Brock Warren. Thompson can also punt, but freshman Aaron Dalton likely secured the starting position with an impressive performance in the spring game.

JoJo Natson, with four career TD returns, is always dangerous on punt returns, but there's lots of room for the Aggies to improve on kickoff returns.

OVERVIEW

It won't be easy overtaking formidable Boise State and returning to the Mountain West Championship Game for the second time in three years, but coach Matt Wells will have the Aggies in contention in the Mountain Division. If Chuckie Keeton can return to something close to form, Utah State can win it.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Devante Mays: The rushing attack could use a boost, and Mays was the only running back the Aggies signed in February, leaving the junior college transfer with a big opportunity. At 5-11, 225 pounds, Mays is a downhill runner who gives USU more size and power than most of its other backs.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	16	Chuckie Keeton	6-2	210	Sr.
RB	21	LaJuan Hunt	5-8	195	So.
RB	20	Rashad Hall	6-1	215	Sr.
WR	9	**JoJo Natson***	5-7	160	Sr.
WR	4	**Hunter Sharp***	6-0	200	Sr.
TE	83	**Wyatt Houston***	6-5	255	Jr.
LT	65	Austin Albrecht	6-5	295	Jr.
LG	72	**Tyshon Mosley***	6-5	290	So.
C	59	**Austin Stephens***	6-3	305	Jr.
RG	75	**Taani Fisilau***	6-2	295	Sr.
RT	76	**Jake Simonich***	6-5	295	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	97	**Jordan Nielsen***	6-5	270	Sr.
NG	70	Travis Seefeldt	6-2	300	Sr.
DE	95	Ricky Ali'ifua	6-3	275	Jr.
LB	41	**Nick Vigil***	6-2	230	Jr.
LB	39	**Torrey Green***	6-2	230	Sr.
LB	9	Kyler Fackrell	6-5	250	Sr.
LB	5	**LT Filiaga***	6-0	240	Sr.
CB	13	**Jalen Davis***	5-10	170	So.
CB	1	**Daniel Gray***	5-11	180	Jr.
SS	24	Marwin Evans	6-1	210	Sr.
FS	37	Devin Centers	5-9	200	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	36	Jake Thompson	6-0	215	Jr.
P	89	Aaron Dalton	6-4	220	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	SOUTHERN UTAH
Sept. 11	at Utah
Sept. 19	at Washington
Oct. 3	COLORADO STATE
Oct. 10	at Fresno State
Oct. 17	BOISE STATE
Oct. 24	at San Diego State
Oct. 31	WYOMING
Nov. 7	at New Mexico
Nov. 14	at Air Force
Nov. 21	NEVADA
Nov. 28	BYU

2014 RESULTS

L	at Tennessee	7-38
W	IDAHO STATE	40-20
W	WAKE FOREST	36-24
L	at Arkansas State (OT)	14-21
W	at BYU	35-20
W	AIR FORCE	34-16
L	at Colorado State	13-16
W	UNLV	34-20
W	at Hawaii	35-14
W	at Wyoming	20-3
W	NEW MEXICO	28-21
W	SAN JOSE STATE	41-7
L	at Boise State	19-50
	New Mexico Bowl	
W	vs. UTEP	21-6

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	26.9	78
Rushing	180.1	49
Passing	198.7	92
Total	378.8	83
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	19.7	12
Rushing	130.7	24
Passing	225.4	57
Total	356.1	30
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+9	+0.64	T-20

SAN DIEGO STATE | AZTECS

MW rank: 3 | Record: 7-6 | MW record: 5-3 (T-1st, West) | Stadium: Qualcomm (54,000)

RANKING 71

AZTECS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: San Diego, Calif.
COACH: Rocky Long — At SDSU: 32-20, 4 years; overall: 97-89, 15 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jeff Horton
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Rocky Long

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1986, WAC
LAST BOWL: 2009
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 6 offense, 7 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Maxwell Smith, RB Donnel Pumphrey, WR Lloyd Mills, WR Mikah Holder, LB Calvin Munson, DT Alex Barrett, DE Jon Sanchez, CB Damontae Kazee, S Trey Lomax, S Malik Smith

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The run-first Aztecs are extremely deep at tailback, led by Pumphrey, which means they can control the clock in virtually every game. Smith could be a strong and steady influence. SDSU also figures to be stingy against the pass, with five returning DBs in Long's 3-3-5 attack.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Though Smith was a starter in the SEC as a freshman, he was limited by injuries for the rest of his Wildcats career. He's not very mobile — a concern, given the inexperience at offensive line. The receivers have to mature and play better. There are holes to fill at linebacker.

DONNEL PUMPHREY
Photo by Jake Roth-USA TODAY Sports

"He's had a lot of people tell him he couldn't do things. And I think that's what really drives him."
— OC Jeff Horton on Donnel Pumphrey

OFFENSE

Thanks to the slashing, big-play running of junior Donnel Pumphrey, San Diego State's pro-style offense will keep its run-first mentality while hoping that graduate transfer quarterback Maxwell Smith can provide steady, mistake-free play.

Pumphrey was one of the best runners in the nation last year, ranking fourth in yards with 1,867, setting the single-season rushing record at SDSU. He posted 10 100-yard games.

Smith returned to his native Southern California in the spring, hoping to get a shot at starting after his promising career at Kentucky was derailed by injuries. He then won the job in spring camp because he's taller and more accurate than SDSU's other prospects.

The young receiving group is a work in progress, with head coach Rocky Long expressing dismay that they didn't improve in 2014. With returners Lloyd Mills and Eric Judge hampered by injuries, others will get their chance to step up. True sophomore Mikah Holder showed considerable potential in the spring.

The line, which blocked so marvelously for Pumphrey in '14, also is a concern. After the disciplinary dismissal of center Lenicio Noble, the Aztecs will have newcomers at center and left tackle.

DEFENSE

Long's 3-3-5 defense ranked first in total defense in the Mountain West last season and was especially strong against the pass. The Aztecs could be just as strong this year, though to do so they will have to allay some depth concerns among the front six while the young defensive backs from a year ago continue to excel.

SDSU has four experienced players at corner, including strong cover men in J.J. Whittaker and Damontae Kazee. The three safeties — Na'im McGee, Trey Lomax and Malik Smith — are excellent at run support.

Linebacker was SDSU's obvious strength in 2014, but three starters have graduated, leaving only the breakout star of the season — true sophomore Calvin Munson — to return with significant playing time.

There are three key returners at defensive line — end Jon Sanchez, defensive tackle Christian Heyward and Alex Barrett, who is shifting from starting nose tackle. There is no one with much experience behind them.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Donny Hageman returns after being the reliable kicker the Aztecs were looking for; he converted 20 of 25 field goal attempts last season. Tanner Blain, a JC transfer, is the new punter. Mills was second in the league in punt return average, and Rashaad Penny claimed the same ranking as a kick returner.

OVERVIEW

The Aztecs have played in five consecutive bowl games, but can boast only one Mountain West title in that time. Long takes pride in a blue-collar approach, but SDSU wasn't tough enough late in games last season. That needs to improve. With a formidable defense and Pumphrey's star qualities, if SDSU can get more reliable play at quarterback, it should contend for the conference championship.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Desean Holmes: He originally committed to USC, and held offers from many major programs, including Nebraska and Oklahoma from outside the West. The speedster from Mission Hills, Calif., reportedly runs a 4.58-second 40-yard dash.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	17	Maxwell Smith	6-5	235	Sr.
RB	19	**Donnel Pumphrey***	5-9	170	Jr.
FB	46	**Dakota Gordon***	5-10	235	Sr.
WR	82	Lloyd Mills	5-10	165	Jr.
WR	85	Mikah Holder	6-0	175	So.
TE	89	Daniel Brunskill	6-5	250	Jr.
LT	75	Kwayde Miller	6-7	310	Jr.
LG	56	**Nico Siragusa***	6-5	325	Jr.
C	70	Arthur Flores	6-5	305	Jr.
RG	72	**Darrell Greene***	6-4	315	Sr.
RT	71	**Pearce Slater***	6-7	335	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	58	**Alex Barrett***	6-3	260	Jr.
NT	92	Christian Heyward	6-3	300	Sr.
DE	99	**Jon Sanchez***	6-2	260	Sr.
LB	54	**Calvin Munson***	6-1	235	Jr.
LB	42	Jake Fely	5-10	215	Sr.
LB	46	Jay Henderson	6-2	205	So.
CB	7	**J.J. Whittaker***	5-10	180	Sr.
CB	23	**Damontae Kazee***	5-11	180	Jr.
S	12	**Malik Smith***	6-0	185	Jr.
S	21	Na'im McGee	6-0	200	Jr.
S	14	**Trey Lomax***	5-11	185	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	59	**Donny Hageman***	6-1	170	Sr.
P	91	Tanner Blain	6-0	210	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	SAN DIEGO
Sept. 12	at California
Sept. 19	SOUTH ALABAMA
Sept. 26	at Penn State
Oct. 3	FRESNO STATE
Oct. 10	at Hawaii
Oct. 17	at San Jose State
Oct. 23	UTAH STATE
Oct. 31	at Colorado State
Nov. 14	WYOMING
Nov. 21	at UNLV
Nov. 28	NEVADA

2014 RESULTS

W	NORTHERN ARIZONA	38-7
L	at North Carolina	27-31
L	at Oregon State	7-28
W	UNLV	34-17
L	at Fresno State	13-24
W	at New Mexico	24-14
W	HAWAII	20-10
L	at Nevada	14-30
W	IDAHO	35-21
L	at Boise State	29-38
W	AIR FORCE	30-14
W	SAN JOSE STATE	38-7
	Poinsettia Bowl	
L	vs. Navy	16-17

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	25.0	T-88
Rushing	216.1	26
Passing	178.4	106
Total	394.5	71
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	19.8	13
Rushing	153.9	48
Passing	178.5	10
Total	332.5	16
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+4	+0.31	T-43

COLORADO STATE | RAMS

MW rank: 4 Record: 10-3 MW record: 6-2 (T-2nd, Mountain)Stadium: Sonny Lubick Field at Hughes Stadium (32,500)

RANKING 75

RAMS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Fort Collins, Colo.
COACH: Mike Bobo — At Colorado State and overall: 1st year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Will Friend
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tyson Summers

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2002
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 6 offense, 8 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH, WR Joe Hansley, WR Rashard Higgins, TE Steven Walker, OG Fred Zerblis, S Trent Matthews, LB Cory James, DE Joe Kawulok

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Rams have an embarrassment of riches in receiving talent, headlined by Higgins. The talent includes 1,000-plus yards from others wideouts, plus standout tight ends Kivon Cartwright and Steven Walker. Despite the loss of RB Dee Hart, the position looked three-deep in spring ball with Purdue transfer Dalyn Dawkins being a revelation.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: MW Offensive Player of the Year Garrett Grayson and his 4,006 passing yards will not be duplicated. There is also no replacing his intangibles. The defense has some work ahead to catch up with defensive heavyweights Boise State and Utah State in the Mountain Division.

RASHARD HIGGINS
Photo by Dennis Hubbard

"He's willing to push me to be great. I am ready to accept that challenge."
— WR Rashard Higgins, on coach Mike Bobo

OFFENSE

Coach Jim McElwain's exit to Florida put a damper on a feel-good season, but the sun rose again in time for spring with former Georgia offensive coordinator Mike Bobo now in charge.

Bobo had no problem identifying The Franchise. Rashard Higgins led the nation in receiving yards (1,750), receiving yards per game (145.8) and receiving touchdowns (17) as a sophomore, a year shy of NFL draft eligibility.

Before he formally met the team and public, Bobo phoned Higgins to introduce himself. But that was the end of special treatment. Bobo vowed to push Higgins harder than anyone on the roster.

It's unrealistic, though, to expect another 4,000 yards passing, as Colorado State got last season from Garrett Grayson, a third-round NFL draft pick.

At the end of the spring, third-year sophomore Nick Stevens held a presumed lead over freshman Coleman Key at quarterback, although Bobo planned to let the competition continue in the fall. Stevens seemed to have a good grasp of the offense, but Key has good stature and physical skills.

A deep stable of running backs will help, although the unit is looking for a standout. Treyous Jarrells is the top returning rusher — with 450 yards last season — after transferring from junior college.

DEFENSE

The new buzzword adopted by Bobo and the entire defense is "violent," to summarize the unit's mindset on the field.

"That's what he wants," fourth-year starting safety Trent Matthews said. "That's the little things that we need to go from being good to great."

Bobo only needs to point to all three of CSU's losses last season — Boise State, Utah and Air Force — as examples of the Rams getting manhandled.

New for this season is a return to the 4-3 front. Bobo doesn't buy into adapting a 3-4 as an answer to alleviating the shortage of quality down linemen at the Mountain West level. The Rams have three returning starters up front, plus SteveO Michel moves to end after playing outside linebacker.

The hub of this defense is senior Cory James (6.5 sacks), who will be stationed at inside and outside linebacker. Defensive tackle Terry Jackson had 5.5 tackles for loss last season.

Free safety Kevin Pierre-Louis is the team's top returning tackler (85 a year ago).

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Rams will miss kicker Jared Roberts, who delivered two walk-off field goals in his career. Punter Hayden Hunt returns with his 43.8-yard average, good for second in the league. The return game is intact.

OVERVIEW

Sonny Lubick was able to grow the 1994 breakout year into a decade of WAC/MW dominance. We'll never know if McElwain could have accomplished the same with a breakout season 20 years later. The personable Bobo has done and said all the right things to win friends in the community and, more significantly, earn respect from his players.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Dalyn Dawkins: The sophomore transfer from Purdue packs a surprising punch at 5-9, 180, and he made a strong claim this spring to be the featured back. CSU is looking for a replacement for Dee Hart, who ran for 1,275 yards last season.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	7	Nick Stevens	6-3	190	So.
RB	3	Treyous Jarrells	5-7	185	Sr.
FB	45	Nu'uvali Fa'apito	6-0	228	Sr.
WR	25	**Joe Hansley***	5-10	180	Sr.
WR	82	**Rashard Higgins***	6-2	188	Jr.
TE	30	**Steven Walker***	6-2	238	Sr.
LT	71	**Sam Carlson***	6-4	290	Sr.
LG	61	Zack Golditch	6-6	290	So.
C	77	Jake Bennett	6-3	295	So.
RG	54	**Fred Zerblis***	6-3	295	Jr.
RT	76	Nick Callender	6-5	327	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	90	**Joe Kawulok***	6-6	260	Sr.
DT	93	**Terry Jackson***	6-2	280	Sr.
NT	68	**Justin Hansen***	6-5	305	Sr.
DE	4	SteveO Michel	6-1	230	Sr.
LB	31	**Cory James***	6-1	240	Sr.
LB	12	Deonte Clyburn	6-1	225	Jr.
LB	33	Kevin Davis	6-3	235	Jr.
CB	5	**Tyree Simmons***	5-11	185	Jr.
CB	24	**Preston Hodges***	5-11	200	Jr.
SS	16	**Trent Matthews***	6-3	210	Sr.
FS	26	**Kevin Pierre-Louis***	6-1	215	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	93	Berto Garcia	5-7	191	So.
P	49	Hayden Hunt*	5-11	210	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	SAVANNAH STATE
Sept. 12	MINNESOTA
Sept. 19	vs. Colorado (Denver, CO)
Sept. 26	at UTSA
Oct. 3	at Utah State
Oct. 10	BOISE STATE
Oct. 17	AIR FORCE
Oct. 31	SAN DIEGO STATE
Nov. 7	at Wyoming
Nov. 14	UNLV
Nov. 21	at New Mexico
Nov. 28	at Fresno State

2014 RESULTS

W	vs. Colorado (Denver, CO)	31-17
L	at Boise State	24-37
W	UC DAVIS	49-21
W	at Boston College	24-21
W	TULSA	42-17
W	at Nevada	31-24
W	UTAH STATE	16-13
W	WYOMING	45-31
W	at San Jose State	38-31
W	HAWAII	49-22
W	NEW MEXICO	58-20
L	at Air Force	24-27
	Las Vegas Bowl	
L	vs. Utah	10-45

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	33.9	30
Rushing	159.3	69
Passing	321.6	8
Total	480.9	18
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.1	44
Rushing	200.8	96
Passing	224.2	56
Total	425.0	85
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 2	+0.15	T-53

FRESNO STATE | BULLDOGS

MW rank: 5 Record: 6-8 MW record: 5-3 (T-1st, West) Stadium: Bulldog Stadium (41,031)

RANKING 84

BULLDOGS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Fresno, Calif.
COACH: Tim DeRuyter — At Fresno State and overall: 26-14, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Dave Schramm
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Nick Toth

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2013
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2011
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 6 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Marteze Waller, TE Chad Olsen, OLB Ejiro Ederaine, ILB Kyrie Wilson, CB Charles Washington

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Waller is a workhorse ready for more responsibility after getting 20 carries in a game only twice last season. Waller ranked 20th in the nation with an average of 6.08 yards per carry. Olsen is developing into a matchup nightmare for opposing defenses. The speedy Washington could become a shutdown corner now that he'll stick to one position.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Unless one of three quarterback candidates can perform beyond his years, the offensive struggles from last season likely will persist. It's also unclear how the Bulldogs will get better on defense after losing two key players to the NFL Draft (NG Tyeler Davison and S Derron Smith). And if Ederaine doesn't make a full recovery, the defense will be hurting.

MARTEZE WALLER
Photo by Juan Lainez / Marinmedia / CSM

OFFENSE

Fresno State didn't come close this spring to stabilizing its shaky quarterback situation from last season.

The abrupt offseason departure of last year's starter, Brian Burrell, left sophomore Zack Greenlee as the most experienced signal-caller, despite playing in only three games. Greenlee was slightly ahead of redshirt freshman Kilton Anderson after spring. Incoming freshman Chason Virgil will get a chance, too.

There are plenty of questions throughout the rest of the offense, too.

Marteze Waller is the only experienced option at running back after rushing for 1,368 yards in 2014, third-best in the Mountain West. But with Fresno State utilizing a spread system, it remains unclear how much the Bulldogs will turn to their dynamic back.

Senior Aaron Peck heads a group of youthful receivers. But Peck also has yet to show consistency. Sophomore Delvon Hardaway, recovering from a partial ACL tear, isn't expected to return until late September.

The Bulldogs do have budding star tight end Chad Olsen, who earned some Freshman All-American recognition. Olsen caught 13 passes for 150 yards and four touchdowns.

Fresno State's offensive line will work in new starters at both guard spots.

DEFENSE

What's happened to the stout defenses that Tim DeRuyter's teams used to field? The Bulldogs' defense has trended the wrong way through three seasons since the former Texas A&M defensive coordinator was hired as the Bulldogs' head coach.

At the center of Fresno State's troubles has been porous cornerback play that has allowed opponents to throw over coverage.

Coordinator Nick Toth hopes that keeping defensive back Charles Washington at cornerback will solidify the situation.

The opposite corner spot still needs to be addressed, especially after Malcolm Washington concluded his true freshman season by getting repeatedly burned in the Hawaii Bowl. Redshirt freshman Anthoula Kelly will challenge Washington.

> "The way our quarterbacks competed this spring, it was really night and day from a year ago."
> — Tim DeRuyter, on having a QB race for the second straight season

Three-year starting outside linebacker Ejiro Ederaine is coming off offseason surgery to both shoulders. The senior is expected to be healthy for fall camp. Senior inside linebacker Kyrie Wilson is perhaps the only sure thing after tallying 177 tackles in the past two seasons.

DeRutyer is pleased with the defense's depth, which could give the Bulldogs options at other positions.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Thrown into the starting lineup, walk-on Kody Kroening converted 45 of 46 PATs and 9 of 14 field goal attempts. Fresno State also signed junior college All-American kicker Jimmy Camacho. Garrett Swanson enters his fourth year as Fresno State's punter.

OVERVIEW

Fresno State won two Mountain West titles during DeRuyter's first two seasons and played for the conference championship last season. But the Bulldogs face a major rebuilding job. A third straight year in the conference championship game might be too difficult to achieve.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Chason Virgil: Once committed to Mississippi State, Virgil instead enrolled early at Fresno State to participate in spring practice and try to win the starting job. He looked like the best quarterback at times, showing the most natural poise in the pocket. If he learns how to set the protections and read defenses better, Virgil could win the position.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	17	Zack Greenlee	6-1	200	So.
RB	**33**	**Marteze Waller***	**5-11**	**209**	**Sr.**
WR	**7**	**Aaron Peck***	**6-3**	**213**	**Sr.**
WR	16	KeeSean Johnson	6-1	179	Fr.
WR	18	Jamire Jordan	5-11	170	Fr.
TE	**46**	**Chad Olsen***	**6-5**	**222**	**So.**
LT	**76**	**Alex Fifita***	**6-4**	**303**	**Sr.**
LG	79	Aaron Mitchell	6-2	291	So.
C	**60**	**Bo Bonnheim***	**6-2**	**283**	**Sr.**
RG	61	Jacob Vazquez	6-2	283	Jr.
RT	**54**	**Justin Northern***	**6-5**	**285**	**Sr.**

DEFENSE

DE	**96**	**Todd Hunt***	**6-3**	**263**	**Sr.**
NG	91	Nathan Madsen	6-4	275	So.
DE	**90**	**Claudell Louis***	**6-4**	**292**	**Sr.**
LB	**31**	**Ejiro Ederaine***	**6-3**	**221**	**Sr.**
LB	**17**	**Kyrie Wilson***	**6-2**	**238**	**Sr.**
LB	42	Jeff Camilli	6-3	263	Jr.
LB	41	Brandon Hughes	6-3	216	Jr.
CB	**28**	**Charles Washington***	**5-11**	**197**	**Sr.**
CB	**20**	**Malcolm Washington***	**6-2**	**165**	**So.**
SS	**5**	**Dalen Jones***	**6-1**	**196**	**Jr.**
FS	15	Stratton Brown	6-1	186	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**48**	**Kody Kroening***	**5-10**	**150**	**So.**
P	**49**	**Garrett Swanson***	**6-0**	**217**	**Sr.**

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	ABILENE CHRISTIAN
Sept. 12	at Ole Miss
Sept. 19	UTAH
Sept. 26	at San Jose State
Oct. 3	at San Diego State
Oct. 10	UTAH STATE
Oct. 17	UNLV
Oct. 24	at Air Force
Nov. 7	NEVADA
Nov. 14	at Hawaii
Nov. 21	at BYU
Nov. 28	COLORADO STATE

2014 RESULTS

L	at USC	13-52
L	at Utah	27-59
L	NEBRASKA	19-55
W	SOUTHERN UTAH	56-16
W	at New Mexico	35-24
W	SAN DIEGO STATE	24-13
L	at UNLV (OT)	27-30
L	at Boise State	27-37
L	WYOMING	17-45
W	SAN JOSE STATE	38-24
W	at Nevada	40-20
W	HAWAII	28-21
	MW Championship Game	
L	vs. Boise State	14-28
	Hawaii Bowl	
L	vs. Rice	6-30

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	26.5	82
Rushing	182.4	44
Passing	223.7	71
Total	406.1	59
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	32.4	99
Rushing	201.9	98
Passing	254.1	96
Total	456.0	108
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 7	- 0.50	T-103

AIR FORCE | FALCONS

MW rank: 6 Record: 10-3 MW record: 5-3 (4th, Mountain) Stadium: Falcon Stadium (46,692)

RANKING 87

FALCONS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Colorado Springs, Colo.
COACH: Troy Calhoun — At Air Force and overall: 59-44, 8 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Thiessen
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Steve Russ

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1998, WAC
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 10; 6 offense, 4 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Nate Romine, RB Jacobi Owens, FB Shayne Davern, WR Jalen Robinette, DE Alex Hansen, OLB Ryan Watson, LB Connor Healy, SS Weston Steelhammer

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Fullbacks Shayne Davern and D.J. Johnson each ran for eight touchdowns last season, helping pave the path for 1,054-yard rusher Jacobi Owens. The fullbacks helped Air Force run for 32 touchdowns on 60 trips inside the red zone, the highest percentage in the nation for teams with at least 50 red-zone trips.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The defensive turnaround was drastic, as Air Force went from 40 points allowed per game in 2013 to 24.2 last year. That's all good, but the loss of several key cogs and a year for opponents to figure out the defense could lead to regression.

JACOBI OWENS
Photo by Dennis Hubbard

OFFENSE

Playing wide receiver for Air Force used to mean a lot of edge blocking and a few opportunities for catches on gadget plays.

Jalen Robinette showed that spot now can earn a player All-Mountain West recognition.

Robinette caught 43 passes for 806 yards and four touchdowns as a sophomore last season, picking up honorable mention all-conference honors. Garrett Brown wasn't far behind with 36 catches for 535 yards and six scores, and tight end Garrett Griffin caught 16 passes for a team-high 19.2 yards per catch and four touchdowns.

Mike Thiessen, in his first year as the lone offensive coordinator after previously sharing the role, designed an attack that involved multiple pass catchers while maintaining a run-first mentality that allowed Jacobi Owens to run for 1,054 yards in 10 games. Meanwhile, fullbacks Shayne Davern and D.J. Johnson combined for 16 touchdowns. They're all back.

Quarterback Kale Pearson was brilliant, but he's gone. Nate Romine took the reins for the Colorado State game, leading the underdog Falcons to a 27-24 victory. Romine has six career starts.

The offensive line will require some jostling, but most of those expected to start have experience.

DEFENSE

Under the solo direction of coordinator Steve Russ for the first time, the Falcons employed an aggressive style. The team blitzed frequently, cornerbacks jammed receivers, and coaches obsessively preached about turnovers. In short, they made it a point to force the action as opposed to reacting to it.

Air Force will continue that style, but gone are linebacker Jordan Pierce, two players from the interior line and three in the secondary.

Good news is that All-Mountain West safety Weston Steelhammer, who picked off six passes, returns, as does four-year starting defensive end Alex Hansen and linebacker Connor Healy.

The story out of the spring wasn't the familiar names, but new players aiming to overtake them.

> "A lot of people say, 'They had a good season, hopefully they can keep it up.' I want to do more than keep it up. I want to improve on it."
>
> — CB Jesse Washington

Backups like linebackers Haji Dunn and Claude Alexander, lineman Santo Coppola and outside linebacker Jacob Onyechi each challenged established starters.

At cornerback, Jesse Washington and Kalon Baker have the confidence and experience to step in as first-time starters, and free safety Hayes Linn has been a longtime backup.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Drew Oehrle will be asked to replace Will Conant, the most accurate kicker in Air Force history. Conant also punted as a senior, with Brett Dunn in line to take that role. Air Force hasn't returned a touchdown since 2009, but sophomore Tyler Williams could be the solution. Williams, a converted quarterback with shifty moves and quick feet, suited up a few times as a freshman, but scarcely played.

OVERVIEW

Air Force jumped from 10 losses to 10 wins by applying pressure defensively, diversifying its offense and remaining healthy. Now, it's hoping to build on that through experience and internal competition. "Good to great," is the mantra, but getting there will require just as many strides as were required for the initial turnaround.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Ryan Brand: It's unlikely he can work his way up the depth chart as a true freshman, but, by all accounts, he's got a shot. Brand, a 5-10, 185-pound dual-threat from Detroit, earned an invitation to the Elite 11 football camp and wowed ESPN's Trent Dilfer. Air Force coaches speak highly of his physical gifts and intangibles.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	6	Nate Romine	5-11	195	Jr.
RB	**28**	**Jacobi Owens***	**6-0**	**202**	**Jr.**
FB	43	Shayne Davern	6-0	240	Jr.
WR	**9**	**Jalen Robinette***	**6-4**	**215**	**Jr.**
WR	**7**	**Garrett Brown***	**5-9**	**180**	**Sr.**
TE	**80**	**Garrett Griffin***	**6-4**	**240**	**Sr.**
LT	**72**	**Matt Rochell***	**6-3**	**270**	**Sr.**
LG	56	Colin Sandor	6-2	275	Jr.
C	67	Dylan Vail	6-2	280	Jr.
RG	**58**	**Andrew Ruechel***	**6-1**	**265**	**Sr.**
RT	74	Sevrin Remmo	6-3	255	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	**87**	**Alex Hansen***	**6-3**	**260**	**Sr.**
NG	53	David Harris	6-0	269	Jr.
DT	93	Samuel Byers	6-5	257	Jr.
LB	40	Ryan Watson	6-3	230	Jr.
LB	**6**	**Connor Healy***	**6-0**	**225**	**Sr.**
LB	41	Patrick Healy	6-1	225	Jr.
LB	**5**	**Dexter Walker***	**6-0**	**205**	**Sr.**
CB	11	Jesse Washington	6-0	185	Jr.
CB	4	Kalon Baker	6-0	185	Sr.
SS	**8**	**Weston Steelhammer***	**6-2**	**200**	**Jr.**
FS	14	Hayes Linn	6-0	185	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	94	Drew Oehrle	6-0	175	Sr.
P	92	Brett Dunn	5-10	190	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	MORGAN STATE
Sept. 12	SAN JOSE STATE
Sept. 19	at Michigan State
Oct. 3	at Navy
Oct. 10	WYOMING
Oct. 17	at Colorado State
Oct. 24	FRESNO STATE
Oct. 31	at Hawaii
Nov. 7	ARMY
Nov. 14	UTAH STATE
Nov. 21	at Boise State
Nov. 28	at New Mexico

2014 RESULTS

W	NICHOLLS STATE	44-16
L	at Wyoming	13-17
W	at Georgia State	48-38
W	BOISE STATE	28-14
W	NAVY	30-21
L	at Utah State	16-34
W	NEW MEXICO	35-31
W	at Army	23-6
W	at UNLV	48-21
W	NEVADA (OT)	45-38
L	at San Diego State	14-30
W	COLORADO STATE	27-24
	Idaho Potato Bowl	
W	vs. Western Michigan	38-24

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	31.5	48
Rushing	273.1	6
Passing	145.6	117
Total	418.7	52
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.2	T-33
Rushing	135.6	28
Passing	259.2	102
Total	394.8	60
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+1	+0.08	T-57

SAN JOSE STATE | SPARTANS

MW rank: 7 Record: 3-9 MW record: 2-6 (5th, West) Stadium: Spartan Stadium (30,456)

RANKING 97

SPARTANS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: San Jose, Calif.
COACH: Ron Caragher — At San Jose State: 9-15, 2 years; overall: 53-37, 8 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Al Borges
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Greg Robinson

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1991, Big West co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2012, Military
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 8 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Tyler Ervin, WR Tyler Winston, LT Wes Schweitzer, LB Christian Tago, CB Jimmy Pruitt, CB Cleveland Wallace III, FS Maurice McKnight

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Ervin gives the offense a home run threat (three touchdowns of 75-plus yards in 2014) and Winston is a chain mover at receiver. Defensively, the secondary was tops in the conference last year and could be even better thanks to Pruitt, Wallace and McKnight.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The offense lacks an identity and has to solve myriad red zone woes. The defense couldn't keep anybody from running the ball last year and returns only one player in the front seven who started more than seven games (Tago).

TYLER WINSTON
Photo by AP Photo/Andy Clayton-King

OFFENSE

San Jose State's quarterback competition was reopened after Joe Gray lacked consistency during his junior year. He's battling juniors Malik Watson and Kenny Potter, a pair of junior college transfers, but his seven career starts could give him the leg up.

The key will be finding somebody who can put the ball in the end zone. The Spartans were last in the Mountain West in scoring at 19.3 points per game despite averaging a respectable 394.5 yards per game. Scoring just 17 touchdowns on 39 red zone trips was the biggest issue.

Senior running back Tyler Ervin is a playmaking utility man who could also play some slot receiver, and junior wide receiver Tyler Winston is a true No. 1 threat. San Jose State will need more — particularly another home run threat at receiver — to improve significantly.

The line should improve with four returning starters, led by senior Wes Schweitzer. But Evan Sarver might not hold onto his right tackle spot, and the post-spring projection is four sophomore starters, two of which combined for 22 starts last year.

New offensive coordinator Al Borges won't change the schemes much, but entering his 28th year as a Division I offensive coordinator, the 59-year-old brings experience and a demanding presence.

DEFENSE

The Spartans' defense jumped from No. 103 nationally in 2013 to No. 32 last year, paced primarily by a secondary that allowed only 117.8 passing yards per game. San Jose State was near the bottom of the country in rushing defense, but overall the defense kept the team in games.

Cornerbacks Cleveland Wallace III (14 passes defended) and Jimmy Pruitt (seven defended) give the Spartans the top cornerback duo in the Mountain West; sophomore safety Maurice McKnight is a hard hitter and keen tackler.

Junior linebacker Christian Tago is the top returning tackler (96) and the defense welcomes back Jared Leaf, who missed all of last year after surviving second- and third-degree burns suffered in an apartment fire.

Senior Tony Popovich is the leader on the defensive line but he needs to stay healthy. He's missed seven games over the past two years to injury and didn't participate in spring ball.

> "It doesn't matter how many yards you gain if you can't put up points."
> — WR Tyler Winston

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Austin Lopez had a rough junior season (12 of 24 on field goal attempts). He's San Jose State's leader with 51 career field goals, which includes 25 consecutive makes to start his career, so there is reason to think he can rebound. Punter Michael Carrizosa averaged just 37.1 yards per attempt as a freshman and will have to hold off incoming true freshman Bryce Crawford.

OVERVIEW

The Spartans lost their final six games last year to continue a two-year regression under third-year coach Ron Caragher, who blamed many of the problems on his offense's inexperience. He won't have that excuse this year, so improvement is expected. The postseason seems like a stretch, but the team has to show progress.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Justin Holmes: He played as well as any at his position last fall camp, but a concussion slowed him before the staff decided a redshirt was the best course of action. The former three-star recruit from Roseville, Calif., boasts the best size of any Spartan receiver (6-2, 214).

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	6	**Joe Gray***	6-2	207	Sr.
RB	7	**Tyler Ervin***	5-10	177	Sr.
FB	49	**Shane Smith***	6-2	238	Jr.
WR	15	**Tyler Winston***	6-2	191	Jr.
WR	87	**Hansell Wilson***	5-9	183	Sr.
TE	18	Billy Freeman	6-3	232	Jr.
LT	72	**Wes Schweitzer***	6-5	301	Sr.
LG	62	**Jeremiah Kolone***	6-3	285	So.
C	68	Keoni Taylor	6-3	293	So.
RG	74	Chris Gonzalez	6-3	295	So.
RT	75	**Nate Velichko***	6-7	300	So.

DEFENSE

DE	96	Cedric Lousi	6-3	261	Sr.
DT	98	**Tony Popovich***	6-2	262	Sr.
DT	92	Keenan Sykes	6-3	277	Jr.
DE	94	Eugene Taylor	6-3	233	Jr.
LB	29	William Ossai	6-2	225	So.
LB	11	Jared Leaf	6-2	240	Sr.
LB	4	**Christian Tago***	6-1	237	Jr.
CB	8	**Jimmy Pruitt***	6-0	203	Sr.
CB	6	**Cleveland Wallace III***	5-11	177	Jr.
SS	26	Vincenté Miles Jr.	6-1	196	Sr.
FS	10	**Maurice McKnight***	6-0	181	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	12	**Austin Lopez***	6-0	209	Sr.
P	17	**Michael Carrizosa***	5-10	229	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	NEW HAMPSHIRE
Sept. 12	at Air Force
Sept. 19	at Oregon State
Sept. 26	FRESNO STATE
Oct. 3	at Auburn
Oct. 10	at UNLV
Oct. 17	SAN DIEGO STATE
Oct. 24	NEW MEXICO
Nov. 6	BYU
Nov. 14	at Nevada
Nov. 21	at Hawaii
Nov. 27	BOISE STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	NORTH DAKOTA	42-10
L	at Auburn	13-59
L	at Minnesota	7-24
L	NEVADA	10-21
W	UNLV	33-10
W	at Wyoming (OT)	27-20
L	at Navy	31-41
L	COLORADO STATE	31-38
L	at Fresno State	24-38
L	HAWAII	0-13
L	at Utah State	7-41
L	at San Diego State	7-38

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	19.3	113
Rushing	141.3	94
Passing	253.2	44
Total	394.5	70
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	29.4	83
Rushing	239.4	116
Passing	117.8	1
Total	357.3	32
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 12	- 1.00	T-114

WYOMING | COWBOYS

MW rank: 8 Record: 4-8 MW record: 2-6 (6th, Mountain) Stadium: War Memorial Stadium (29,181)

RANKING 99

COWBOYS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Laramie, Wyo.
COACH: Craig Bohl — At Wyoming: 4-8, 1 year; overall: 108-40, 12 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brent Vigen
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Steve Stanard

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1993, WAC co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2011, New Mexico
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 7 offense, 4 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Cameron Coffman, RB Shaun Wick, RB Brian Hill, WR Tanner Gentry, LG Chase Roullier, DE Eddie Yarbrough, LB Lucas Wacha

POTENTIAL STRENGTHS: The running back tandem of Wick and Hill is one of the most potent in the Mountain West, and Coffman adds an experienced element to the mix. Yarbrough is a two-time all-conference pick who is a game-changer. He should vie for conference Defensive Player of the Year honors.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: There likely won't be a less-experienced secondary in the nation than Wyoming's. At the end of spring drills, four redshirt freshmen topped the depth chart. Wacha is the Cowboys' lone returning starter at linebacker. Yes, Wyoming's back seven will need to grow quickly.

EDDIE YARBROUGH
Photo by Steve Beyer

OFFENSE

The Cowboys will start a new quarterback, but one with experience at the FBS level.

Senior Cameron Coffman ranked second in the Big Ten with 2,734 passing yards in 2012 as a sophomore at Indiana. He lost his starting job the next season and sat out at Wyoming in 2014 to satisfy NCAA transfer rules.

He'll be relied on to boost an offense that ranked 107th nationally at 21.1 points per game last season.

The Cowboys have proven running backs in senior Shaun Wick and sophomore Brian Hill. Wick carried for at least 97 yards in five of Wyoming's first seven games, but suffered a broken hand in the eighth game, sidelining him for three games.

Hill rushed for 121 yards against Colorado State in that eighth week and later amassed 281 rushing yards at Fresno State. Wick finished with 753 yards and six touchdowns for the year, while Hill had 796 yards and seven TDs.

Wyoming's top two receivers, Dominic Rufran and Jalen Claiborne, graduated.

DEFENSE

The biggest question is Wyoming's back seven. That means Eddie Yarbrough will be all the more vital to the Cowboys' success.

The two-time all-conference defensive end will anchor a seasoned line. Yarbrough ranked second among Mountain West linemen in tackles last season with 63. He finished with 10.5 tackles for loss, including a team-high four sacks.

Junior defensive tackle Uso Olive and senior defensive end Siaosi Hala'api'api both made at least 20 tackles last season.

Behind them will be some uncertainty.

Only junior Lucas Wacha boasts starting experience at linebacker. He ranked fifth on the team with 52 tackles a year ago.

Junior Eric Nzeocha moved from offense to linebacker. He is expected to start alongside Tim Kamana, who made 44 tackles at free safety last season. Junior Will Tutein was moved from safety to linebacker to add depth.

> "You can see his maturity from the years he played at Indiana come through."
> — Craig Bohl, on QB Cameron Coffman's spring performance

At the end of spring, the Cowboys' four starters in the secondary were all redshirt freshmen, including two walk-ons.

Sophomore Robert Priester — who started seven of the last eight games in 2014 — missed the spring due to injury, but should factor into an otherwise thin group of defensive backs.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Junior Ethan Wood ranked sixth in the Mountain West at 41.4 yards per punt last season and he improved his accuracy in the offseason. Junior kicker Justin Martin redshirted a year ago after holding kickoff duties during his first two years with the Cowboys. He'll compete with a couple of true freshmen.

Wyoming tried a number of kickoff and punt return combinations during the spring, including running backs Wick and Hill.

OVERVIEW

Wyoming has reached just three bowl games in the past 22 years, with the last coming in 2011. To become bowl-eligible again, they'll need to get their inexperienced defense up to speed quickly, and Cameron Coffman will need to be efficient. Without much depth, there is little margin for error.

TOP NEWCOMER

SS Chavez Pownell Jr.: The redshirt freshman made an interception in the Cowboys' spring game, followed by a huge hit that got him ejected for targeting. Replays showed the hit was clean. Secondary coach Curt Mallory says: "I think he's got some explosion."

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	2	Cameron Coffman	6-2	197	Sr.
RB	21	**Shaun Wick***	5-10	205	Sr.
FB	36	**Drew Van Maanen***	6-1	226	So.
WR	4	Tanner Gentry	6-2	207	Jr.
WR	83	Jake Maulhardt	6-6	205	Jr.
TE	88	**Jacob Hollister***	6-4	224	Jr.
LT	59	**Ryan Cummings***	6-5	301	So.
LG	73	**Chase Roullier***	6-4	293	Jr.
C	64	Charlie Renfree	6-3	255	Fr.
RG	51	Troy Boyland	6-2	298	Sr.
RT	58	Taylor Knestis	6-5	297	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	55	**Eddie Yarbrough***	6-3	251	Sr.
DT	90	**Uso Olive***	6-1	301	Jr.
NT	57	Chase Appleby	6-0	252	Jr.
DE	34	Siaosi Hala'api'api	6-2	250	Sr.
LB	23	**Tim Kamana***	5-11	196	So.
LB	11	Eric Nzeocha	6-3	211	Jr.
LB	45	Lucas Wacha	6-1	214	Jr.
CB	26	C.J. Jennings	5-10	180	Fr.
CB	19	Anthony Makransky	5-10	170	Fr.
SS	31	Chavez Pownell Jr.	5-11	192	Fr.
FS	87	Adam Pilapil	6-1	189	Fr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	39	Justin Martin	5-10	187	Jr.
P	41	**Ethan Wood***	6-3	173	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	NORTH DAKOTA
Sept. 12	EASTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 19	at Washington State
Sept. 26	NEW MEXICO
Oct. 3	at Appalachian State
Oct. 10	at Air Force
Oct. 17	NEVADA
Oct. 24	at Boise State
Oct. 30	at Utah State
Nov. 7	COLORADO STATE
Nov. 14	at San Diego State
Nov. 28	UNLV

2014 RESULTS

W	MONTANA	17-12
W	AIR FORCE	17-13
L	at Oregon	14-48
W	FAU	20-19
L	at Michigan State	14-56
L	at Hawaii	28-38
L	SAN JOSE STATE (OT)	20-27
L	at Colorado State	31-45
W	at Fresno State	45-17
L	UTAH STATE	3-20
L	BOISE STATE	14-63
L	at New Mexico	30-36

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	21.1	107
Rushing	153.2	T-77
Passing	227.8	67
Total	380.9	81
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	32.8	T-100
Rushing	203.1	101
Passing	227.8	61
Total	430.8	89
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 2	- 0.17	T-76

NEW MEXICO | LOBOS

MW rank: 9 Record: 4-8 MW record: 2-6 MW (T-5th, Mountain) Stadium: University (39,224)

RANKING 103

LOBOS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Albuquerque, N.M.
COACH: Bob Davie — At New Mexico: 11-26, 3 years; overall: 46-51, 6 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Bob DeBesse
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kevin Cosgrove

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1964, WAC co-champions
LAST BOWL: 2007, New Mexico
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 7 offense, 6 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Lamar Jordan, RB Jhurell Pressley, RB Teriyon Gipson, TE Reece White, DE Nik D'Avanzo, MLB Dakota Cox, LB Kimmie Carson, CB Cranston Jones

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Pressley and Gipson lead a strong rushing attack. On defense, the Lobos have three linebackers and two linemen back as starters. Getting Cox back from a knee injury will be paramount. He made nine starts last year and still led the team in tackles.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Lobos have struggled in the passing game for years. Jordan will be pushed by junior college transfer Austin Apodaca, but there are few receivers back with experience. New Mexico has a lot of inexperience in its new five-man secondary.

CARLOS WIGGINS
Photo by Kenneth Rutt Icon Sportswire via AP Images

OFFENSE

As has been the case for many years, New Mexico's strength is primarily on the ground. The Lobos' top three 2014 rushers return.

Senior Jhurell Pressley rushed for 1,083 yards on 114 carries, including 12 touchdowns, last season. Junior Teriyon Gipson had 809 yards and eight touchdowns on 150 carries.

The third runner of note is sophomore quarterback Lamar Jordan, who had 612 yards and three touchdowns on 120 carries. Jordan was 59 of 112 through the air last year for 895 yards. He threw for six touchdowns with five interceptions.

But Jordan's not a lock for the starting spot. Junior Austin Apodaca, a transfer from Mesa Community College in Arizona, pushed him all spring and will continue to do so this fall.

The Lobos have far less experience at wide receiver, as no starters return. Senior tight end Reece White caught eight passes for 124 yards and a touchdown last year, making him the top-producing returnee.

New Mexico will have plenty of experience back on the offensive line. Junior center Garrett Adcock, senior left guard Eden Mahina and junior left tackle Reno Henderson all return as starters. Upperclassmen will start on the right side of the line as well.

DEFENSE

The Lobos were particularly vulnerable to the pass last year, giving up 2,995 yards and 18 touchdowns. To alleviate that, New Mexico will go with five defensive backs on most plays.

Of the five projected starters, only one was a full-time starter last season. Senior cornerback Cranston Jones led the team with three interceptions, while adding four passes break-ups and 27 tackles.

Junior cornerback Isaiah Brown and junior strong safety Ryan Santos have some experience. Sophomore safety Ricky Bennett and junior free safety Daniel Henry redshirted last year.

The Lobos should be strong at linebacker, where three starters return. The big name is junior Dakota Cox, who injured his knee in the ninth game of last season, yet still led the team with 116 tackles. Sophomore Kimmie Carson (62 tackles) and junior Donnie White (20 tackles) will flank Cox.

Another key returnee working his way back from injury is senior nose tackle Cole Juarez, who started just six games last season. Junior defensive end Nik D'Avanzo returns after leading New Mexico with seven tackles for loss and 4.5 sacks last season.

"We made a lot of strides this spring. Now, we have to go and win games."
— Bob Davie

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Zack Rogers was responsible for kicking and punting last season. He was more effective at the latter and will only be responsible for punting in 2015. Sophomore Jason Sanders will take over as the kicker. Senior receiver Carlos Wiggins will handle kick returns; he had a touchdown in that role last year.

OVERVIEW

The Lobos look strong on the ground again, but they will need to improve the passing game to be a more balanced team. While the defense has plenty of experience, it remains to be seen if it will be enough to finally get New Mexico back above .500.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Austin Apodaca: A transfer from Mesa (Ariz.) Community College, the 6-3 Apodaca is a serious challenger to Lamar Jordan for the starting job. Apodaca threw for 2,534 yards at Mesa last season after having previously attended Washington State as a freshman.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	13	**Lamar Jordan***	5-10	183	So.
RB	6	**Jhurell Pressley***	5-10	200	Sr.
RB	7	**Teriyon Gipson***	5-8	180	Jr.
WR	28	Dameon Gamblin	5-10	163	Jr.
WR	24	Carlos Wiggins	5-8	166	Sr.
TE	80	**Reece White***	6-1	220	Sr.
LT	75	**Reno Henderson***	6-3	260	Jr.
LG	51	**Eden Mahina***	6-3	290	Sr.
C	62	**Garrett Adcock***	6-2	282	Jr.
RG	79	Bryan Oldenkamp	6-4	310	Sr.
RT	56	Johnny Vizcaino	6-2	275	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	91	**Nik D'Avanzo***	6-3	285	Jr.
NT	52	**Cole Juarez***	6-2	305	Sr.
DE	95	Garrett Hughes	6-1	270	So.
LB	54	**Donnie White***	6-1	227	Jr.
LB	49	**Dakota Cox***	6-0	230	Jr.
LB	2	**Kimmie Carson***	6-0	199	So.
CB	4	Isaiah Brown	5-11	180	Jr.
CB	3	**Cranston Jones***	5-8	176	Sr.
S	19	Ricky Bennett	6-0	208	So.
SS	12	Ryan Santos	5-10	180	Jr.
FS	14	Daniel Henry	6-1	182	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	95	Jason Sanders	5-10	170	So.
P	90	**Zack Rogers***	5-9	190	Sr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE
Sept. 12	TULSA
Sept. 18	at Arizona State
Sept. 26	at Wyoming
Oct. 3	NEW MEXICO STATE
Oct. 10	at Nevada
Oct. 17	HAWAII
Oct. 24	at San Jose State
Nov. 7	UTAH STATE
Nov. 14	at Boise State
Nov. 21	COLORADO STATE
Nov. 28	AIR FORCE

2014 RESULTS

L	UTEP	24-31
L	ARIZONA STATE	23-58
W	at New Mexico State	38-35
L	FRESNO STATE	24-35
W	at UTSA	21-9
L	SAN DIEGO STATE	14-24
L	at Air Force	31-35
W	at UNLV	31-28
L	BOISE STATE	49-60
L	at Utah State	21-28
L	at Colorado State	20-58
W	WYOMING	36-30

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	27.7	T-71
Rushing	310.4	4
Passing	89.1	123
Total	399.5	64
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	35.9	110
Rushing	269.0	122
Passing	250.0	92
Total	519.0	124
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 1	+ 0.08	56

NEVADA | WOLF PACK

MW rank: 10 Record: 7-6 MW record: 4-4 MW (3rd, West) Stadium: Mackay Stadium (29,993)

RANKING 107

WOLF PACK at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Reno, Nev.
COACH: Brian Polian — At Nevada and overall: 11-14, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Nick Rolovich
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Scott Boone

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2010
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 6 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Don Jackson, RB James Butler, WR Hasaan Henderson, LT Austin Corbett, DE Ian Seau, DT Rykeem Yates, LB Matthew Lyons, LB Jordan Dobrich

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The defensive front seven could end up being an all-senior group, giving Nevada an experienced backbone. The linebackers are especially experienced and Nevada has proven pass-rushers on the line. Offensively, Jackson and Butler had great spring camps at running back.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Nevada's starting offensive line is a young group that will have to develop quickly. The team's returning secondary has a combined eight career starts and has a lot to prove.

DON JACKSON
Photo by Scott Donaldson Icon Sportswire via AP Images

OFFENSE

The big question facing the Wolf Pack is, "Who replaces quarterback Cody Fajardo?"

Junior Tyler Stewart, sophomore Dante Mayes and freshman Hunter Fralick are in a three-way battle to replace Fajardo, a four-year starter and one of two quarterbacks in FBS history with 9,000 passing yards and 3,000 rushing yards. Polian did not tip his hand on the starter coming out of spring camp.

Whoever wins the job will have some nice weapons.

Nevada returns its top two rushers — Don Jackson (957 yards, seven touchdowns) and James Butler (635 yards, five TDs). Butler came on strong toward the end of his true freshman campaign and had an impressive spring camp, leading to prognostications that he could be in line for a breakout season.

The Wolf Pack also returns two of its three starting receivers. The 6-foot-5 Hasaan Henderson had 45 catches for 579 yards and four touchdowns last season. Slot receiver Jerico Richardson made 56 catches. And tight end Jarred Gipson earned second-team all-conference honors.

The offensive line is another story.

The front wall is expected to start four sophomores and four players who came to Nevada as walk-ons (although three have been put on scholarship).

DEFENSE

Five of the front seven starters return, and the Wolf Pack feels confident that its defensive line is one of the best in the MW. Defensive ends Ian Seau (8.5 sacks, 10.5 TFLs) and Lenny Jones (five sacks, 8.5 TFLs), and defensive tackle Rykeem Yates (10.5 TFL), form a strong trio.

They'll be joined by UCLA transfer Kevin McReynolds, a 300-pound nose guard who will be in the mix as an immediately eligible graduate transfer.

At linebacker, Jordan Dobrich, Matthew Lyons and Bryan Lane Jr., have combined for 56 career starts. They also combined for 235 tackles last season.

The secondary will be the determining factor in whether Nevada can take the step up from being an average defense. The Wolf Pack, in a sense, lost all four starting defensive backs in the offseason, with cornerbacks Charles Garrett and Evan Favors and strong safety Nigel Haikins graduating, and free safety Duran Workman moving to linebacker.

The two-deep includes three freshmen, three sophomores and two juniors.

"We're young. We're so young. We're inexperienced. But we are a hard-working group."
— Right guard Jeremy Macauley, on the offensive line

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Wolf Pack are in good hands with kicker Brent Zuzo, who is 28 of 35 on field goal attempts in his career. Punter Alex Boy was second-team All-MW last season with a 44.3-yard average.

Kick returner Elijah Mitchell is back after averaging 24.8 yards per return in 2014. Nevada could use a spark in its return game. The Wolf Pack hasn't returned a kickoff for a touchdown since 1998.

OVERVIEW

After missing a bowl in 2013, the Wolf Pack rebounded in 2014 to reach the postseason. But taking another step forward will be difficult for Nevada, which lost several key pieces, including Fajardo. This could be a rebuilding year, but the league's West Division is wide open.

TOP NEWCOMER

NT Kevin McReynolds: The graduate transfer from UCLA is expected to help plug any holes in the middle of the defensive line. McReynolds, a four-star recruit out of high school, toggled between offensive and defensive line during his UCLA tenure, and mostly played on special teams in 2014.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	15	Tyler Stewart	6-4	220	Jr.
RB	6	**Don Jackson***	5-10	210	Sr.
WR	12	**Hasaan Henderson***	6-5	220	Jr.
WR	84	**Jerico Richardson***	5-11	190	Jr.
WR	87	Brayden Sanchez	5-11	200	Jr.
TE	47	**Jarred Gipson***	6-1	240	Jr.
LT	73	**Austin Corbett***	6-4	280	So.
LG	60	Adam Khouri	6-3	295	So.
C	69	Thomas Newton	6-1	240	So.
RG	72	Jeremy Macauley	6-1	305	Jr.
RT	61	**Joey Anglemire***	6-3	280	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	8	**Ian Seau***	6-2	255	Sr.
NT	97	Salesa Faraimo	6-2	275	Jr.
DT	55	**Rykeem Yates***	6-2	270	Sr.
DE	94	Lenny Jones	6-3	270	Sr.
LB	9	**Matthew Lyons***	6-2	230	Sr.
LB	49	**Jordan Dobrich***	6-2	235	Sr.
LB	25	**Bryan Lane Jr.***	6-4	220	Sr.
CB	31	Randy Uzoma	6-1	205	Jr.
CB	28	Elijah Mitchell	5-8	180	Jr.
SS	26	Kendall Johnson	6-0	180	So.
FS	22	Asauni Rufus	6-0	185	Fr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	40	**Brent Zuzo***	5-10	175	Jr.
P	46	**Alex Boy***	6-3	195	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	UC DAVIS
Sept. 12	ARIZONA
Sept. 19	at Texas A&M
Sept. 26	at Buffalo
Oct. 3	UNLV
Oct. 10	NEW MEXICO
Oct. 17	at Wyoming
Oct. 24	HAWAII
Nov. 5	at Fresno State
Nov. 14	SAN JOSE STATE
Nov. 21	at Utah State
Nov. 28	at San Diego State

2014 RESULTS

W	SOUTHERN UTAH	28-19
W	WASHINGTON STATE	24-13
L	at Arizona	28-35
W	at San Jose State	21-10
L	BOISE STATE	46-51
L	COLORADO STATE	24-31
W	at BYU	42-35
W	at Hawaii	26-18
W	SAN DIEGO STATE	30-14
L	at Air Force (OT)	38-45
L	FRESNO STATE	20-40
W	at UNLV	49-27
	New Orleans Bowl	
L	vs. Louisiana	3-16

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	29.2	61
Rushing	205.5	36
Passing	192.2	96
Total	397.6	68
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.2	T-68
Rushing	179.5	79
Passing	267.6	109
Total	447.1	100
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 11	+ 0.85	T-11

UNLV | REBELS

MW rank: 11 Record: 2-11 MW rank: 1-7 (6th, West) Stadium: Sam Boyd Stadium (36,800)

RANKING 118

REBELS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Las Vegas, Nev.
COACH: Tony Sanchez — At UNLV and overall: 1st year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Barney Cotton
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kent Baer

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1994, Big West co-champions
LAST BOWL: 2013, Heart of Dallas
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 7 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Blake Decker, WR Devonte Boyd, WR Kendal Keys, DL Sonny Sanitoa, LB Tau Lotulelei, LB Ryan McAleenan, CB Torry McTyer, S Peni Vea

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The starting wide receivers will be as good as any in the Mountain West. Decker showed promise late in spring practice and needs to build on that production. The linebackers are the most experienced part of the team, and Vea is a one of the league's top safeties.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Both lines are inexperienced and lack depth. UNLV will have to look hard to find an every-down running back, and must hope one of the freshmen step forward. The defense can't continue to let opposing offenses dictate tempo.

DEVONTE BOYD
Photo by AP Photo/John Locher

"How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. We're chewing our tail off right now. It's a big elephant."
— Coach Tony Sanchez

OFFENSE

Returning starter Blake Decker all but won the quarterback job with a strong final week of spring practice. He was sensational in the spring game, completing all five passes for 166 yards and three touchdowns.

Decker has always had talent, but his decision-making, along with a suspect offensive line that forced him to scramble last season, resulted in 18 interceptions. Under UNLV's new coaching staff, he worked on getting rid of the ball quicker, and he clearly picked up the offense as spring went along.

But Decker again will play behind a questionable line, one that lost three starters from last season. So expect the Rebels to max protect, leaving not only a running back, but also a fullback in to block, while also making use of a tight end.

If he can get the ball out on time, Decker has one of the Mountain West's best 1-2 receiving combos in Devonte Boyd and Kendal Keys. Boyd was the conference Freshman of the Year after catching 65 passes for 980 yards and four touchdowns. Keys, who originally signed with Boise State, has shown glimpses of why the Broncos were interested in him.

Keith Whitely emerged atop the depth chart at running back following spring, but freshmen Lexington Thomas and Xzaviar Campbell will be given every opportunity to contribute.

DEFENSE

The Rebels haven't played good defense since John Robinson coached the team in the early 2000s. New coach Tony Sanchez said the Rebels will have to take chances, ordering up a blitz to try to make a play. It's risky putting the cornerbacks in single coverage, but Sanchez believes he has little choice.

Not that there isn't talent. Every linebacker returns, including Tau Lotulelei, who led the team with 99 tackles last season, including 10.5 for loss.

Hope also can be found in the secondary, where safety Peni Vea is back after making 88 tackles. The rest of the starting defensive backfield is inexperienced, but safety Blake Richmond and cornerback Torry McTyer looked impressive in the spring.

End/tackle Sonny Sanitoa is the top returning player on the line, but the Rebels came out of spring not sure how many others they could count on up front.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Jonathan Leiva and punter Logan Yunker return after up-and-down seasons. Leiva made 11 of 17 field goal attempts, and Yunker averaged 40.5 yards per punt. Also keep an eye on Nicolai Bornand, who has a strong leg and could step in for Leiva on long field goals.

OVERVIEW

Sanchez, who oversaw powerhouse Las Vegas Bishop Gorman High School, has created plenty of excitement around the program since UNLV's bold move to hire him. Still, he and his coaches know this won't be a quick turnaround. The program has finished eight of the previous 11 years with two victories each. A demanding non-conference schedule doesn't make the task easier. Anything north of two victories would be considered success.

TOP NEWCOMER

CB Jay'Onn Myles: He selected the Rebels over Baylor, and will be important to any success in the secondary. He doesn't arrive until August, so he will be behind his fellow defensive backs going into camp. But once he picks up the system, Myles will be expected to produce at a high level.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	5	**Blake Decker***	6-2	205	Sr.
RB	28	Keith Whitely	5-9	185	Jr.
WR	83	**Devonte Boyd***	6-1	175	So.
WR	6	**Anthony Williams***	5-11	190	Sr.
WR	84	Kendal Keys	6-3	200	So.
TE	46	**Jake Phillips***	6-6	255	Sr.
LT	76	**Kyle Saxelid***	6-7	279	So.
LG	60	**Eric Noone***	6-2	300	Jr.
C	58	Will Kreitler	6-0	295	Jr.
RG	72	**Ron Scoggins***	6-3	335	Sr.
RT	63	J'Ondray Sanders	6-5	270	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	93	**Sonny Sanitoa***	6-3	260	Sr.
DT	99	Mike Hughes Jr.	6-2	300	So.
DT	68	Tuli Fakauho	6-1	300	Sr.
DE	54	Iggy Porchia	6-2	225	Jr.
LB	23	**Matt Lea***	5-10	210	So.
LB	56	**Ryan McAleenan***	6-2	230	Jr.
LB	55	**Tau Lotulelei***	6-1	220	Jr.
CB	4	Torry McTyer	6-0	180	Jr.
CB	24	Fred Wilson	6-0	175	Sr.
S	42	**Peni Vea***	6-1	205	Sr.
FS	2	Blake Richmond	6-3	190	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	38	**Jonathan Leiva***	5-11	175	Sr.
P	45	**Logan Yunker***	6-2	200	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Northern Illinois
Sept. 12	UCLA
Sept. 19	at Michigan
Sept. 26	IDAHO STATE
Oct. 3	at Nevada
Oct. 10	SAN JOSE STATE
Oct. 17	at Fresno State
Oct. 31	BOISE STATE
Nov. 7	HAWAII
Nov. 14	at Colorado State
Nov. 21	SAN DIEGO STATE
Nov. 28	at Wyoming

2014 RESULTS

L	at Arizona	13-58
W	NORTHERN COLORADO	13-12
L	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	34-48
L	at Houston	14-47
L	at San Diego State	17-34
L	at San Jose State	10-33
W	FRESNO STATE (OT)	30-27
L	at Utah State	20-34
L	NEW MEXICO	28-31
L	AIR FORCE	21-48
L	at BYU	23-42
L	at Hawaii	35-37
L	NEVADA	27-49

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	21.9	104
Rushing	129.2	102
Passing	258.2	43
Total	387.4	78
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	38.5	113
Rushing	293.8	123
Passing	219.6	50
Total	513.5	123
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
-7	- 0.54	105

HAWAII | WARRIORS

MW rank: 12 Record: 4-9 MW record: 3-5 (4th, West) Stadium: Aloha Stadium (50,000)

RANKING 120

WARRIORS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Honolulu, Hawaii
COACH: Norm Chow — At Hawaii and overall: 8-29, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Don Bailey
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tom Mason

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2010, co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2010, Hawaii
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 6 offense, 7 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Max Wittek, LT Ben Clarke, RG Dejon Allen, SB Dylan Collie, DE Luke Shawley, OLB Jerrol Garcia-Williams, CB Ne'Quan Phillips, S Marrell Jackson

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Wittek and Ikaika Woolsey have experience as Division I quarterbacks. The secondary is three-deep at safety and cornerback. New schemes on both sides of the ball could invigorate the Warriors.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: On the other hand, the Warriors will have new play-callers on offense and defense for the third time in four years. There also is a new special teams coordinator. Stability and continuity are concerns after three down years under Chow, who hasn't retained a single assistant coach from his initial 2012 staff.

OFFENSE

Quarterback Max Wittek, who redshirted last year after transferring from USC, took most of the first-team reps this spring. Teammates selected Wittek as one of four co-captains.

The coaches still will wait until camp to announce a starter. Ikaika Woolsey, who started 12 of 13 games last year, has recovered from a season-long back injury and is the main competition.

New coordinator Don Bailey has implemented an up-tempo spread offense that mirrors the attack he ran at Idaho State.

Although the Warriors were in three-receiver sets last year, they rarely threw check-down passes to the tight end. That will change this year, with Tui Unga, a converted defensive end, aligned as a motion tight end in the slot, wide or backfield.

Wide receivers Marcus Kemp and Ammon Barker — each 6-4 and former basketball players — run post patterns than resemble post-up moves. Wideout Vasquez Haynes, who missed last season following shoulder surgery, also has basketball in his DNA. Speedy Devan Stubblefield, who suffered a season-ending knee injury in 2014 training camp, has healed.

An intriguing weapon is wideout Keelan Ewaliko, who averaged 14.6 yards per touch last season. He was valuable on go-routes and fly sweeps.

Ben Clarke is the Warriors' best blind-side tackle and center. If Leo Koloamatangi steps up as a left tackle, then Clarke can return to center, where he played as a freshman and sophomore.

DEFENSE

During spring ball, offensive linemen had difficulty figuring out where nose tackle Penitito Faalologo would attack. Faalologo, raw and ferocious, can splice through gaps, hold the point or hustle to the perimeter. Any which way, he creates needed chaos.

New coordinator Tom Mason is keeping the team's 3-4 base but will be attack much more. Three years ago at SMU, he ordered blitzes up to 70 percent of the time in a game. The result was an NCAA-record seven interceptions for touchdowns in 2012.

STEVEN LAKALAKA
Photo by Dennis Hubbard

"We preach turnovers all the time. I'm one of those guys who wants to take chances to get the ball back."
— Defensive coordinator Tom Mason

The Warriors have hybrid ends bracketing Faalologo. Kennedy Tulimasealii can play nose tackle; Luke Shawley, a former Navy SEAL, is built like a rush end.

Mason expects to use a platoon system at linebacker, meaning Benetton Fonua, a fast-forward hitter, will open at one of the two inside positions. Fonua always had the tools, but now he has a more unstructured role. Fonua, like Faalologo, thrives in creating chaos.

Ne'Quan Phillips is feisty at one corner. Nick Nelson is seeking to be a four-year starting cornerback.

SPECIAL TEAMS

True freshman Alex Trifonovitch is first in line to succeed Scott Harding as punter. Aaron Novoa, a junior walk-on who also is competing at place-kicker, did all the punting in spring ball. Redshirt freshman Kainoa McDonald will challenge Novoa at place-kicker.

OVERVIEW

With only one scholarship player remaining from the 2011 recruiting class, the Warriors probably need another year to fully stock the roster. The Warriors have relied heavily on transfers. There is not enough depth, but there is enough talent to show improvement.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Max Wittek: After deciding to leave USC, Wittek took recruiting trips to Texas and Louisville before deciding to join the Warriors, citing coach Norm Chow as the biggest factor. Wittek is best suited as a pocket passer, but he showed elusiveness on rollouts and play-action passes this spring.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	13	Max Wittek	6-4	240	Sr.
RB	**4**	**Steven Lakalaka***	**5-10**	**215**	**Jr.**
WR	**14**	**Marcus Kemp***	**6-4**	**185**	**Jr.**
WR	12	Keelan Ewaliko	5-11	175	So.
SB	**5**	**Quinton Pedroza***	**6-2**	**220**	**Sr.**
TE	**87**	**Harold Molenii***	**6-2**	**245**	**Sr.**
LT	**71**	**Ben Clarke***	**6-3**	**285**	**Sr.**
LG	56	Elijah Tupai	6-4	265	So.
C	69	Brenden Urban	6-1	295	Sr.
RG	**50**	**Dejon Allen***	**6-2**	**270**	**So.**
RT	74	R.J. Hollis	6-4	285	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	93	Luke Shawley	6-3	240	Sr.
NT	54	Penitito Faalologo	5-11	250	So.
DE	**90**	**Kennedy Tulimasealii***	**6-1**	**280**	**Jr.**
LB	**2**	**Jerrol Garcia-Williams***	**6-2**	**215**	**Jr.**
LB	**28**	**Julian Gener***	**5-11**	**235**	**Sr.**
LB	**3**	**Simon Poti***	**6-0**	**220**	**Jr.**
LB	17	Lance Williams	6-0	220	Sr.
CB	**1**	**Ne'Quan Phillips***	**5-9**	**185**	**Sr.**
CB	**20**	**Nick Nelson***	**6-0**	**190**	**So.**
S	10	Marrell Jackson	6-0	185	Sr.
S	**39**	**Trayvon Henderson***	**6-0**	**190**	**Jr.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	90	Aaron Novoa	6-0	190	Jr.
P	15	Alex Trifonovitch	6-1	180	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	COLORADO
Sept. 12	at Ohio State
Sept. 19	UC DAVIS
Sept. 26	at Wisconsin
Oct. 3	at Boise State
Oct. 10	SAN DIEGO STATE
Oct. 17	at New Mexico
Oct. 24	at Nevada
Oct. 31	AIR FORCE
Nov. 7	at UNLV
Nov. 14	FRESNO STATE
Nov. 21	SAN JOSE STATE
Nov. 28	ULM

2014 RESULTS

L	WASHINGTON	16-17
L	OREGON STATE	30-38
W	NORTHERN IOWA	27-24
L	at Colorado	12-21
L	at Rice	14-28
W	WYOMING	38-28
L	at San Diego State	10-20
L	NEVADA	18-26
L	UTAH STATE	14-35
L	at Colorado State	22-49
W	at San Jose State	13-0
W	UNLV	37-35
L	at Fresno State	21-28

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	20.9	108
Rushing	149.5	83
Passing	214.9	79
Total	364.4	98
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	26.8	64
Rushing	172.3	73
Passing	245.8	89
Total	418.1	82
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
-7	- 0.54	T-105

PICKING THE PAC-12

After Four Years, the Pac-12 South is Ready to Rise

The Pac-12 South is loaded, ready for a breakthrough. Arizona State coach Todd Graham has heard this plenty of times over the offseason. He agrees with it, but he also finds it amusing.

"The North's won the league every year!" Graham said. "Until they get unseated, you have to give them some credit."

He's right. Since the conference fielded 12 schools for the first time in 2011, the winner of the Pac-12 championship has come from the North — Oregon, Stanford twice and then Oregon again last season. In fact, only one title game has been even close. The other three have been routs, a clear indication of North superiority (at least at the very top).

But this year could be different. This year, the South could rise.

At this point, USC — behind Heisman Trophy candidate Cody Kessler — is considered the South frontrunner, but you could make the argument that three other teams deserve that honor as well. Arizona State returns nine defensive starters from a team that last season finished 13th nationally in sacks.

Arizona returns quarterback Anu Solomon, running back Nick Wilson and All-American linebacker Scooby Wright. How impressive were the Wildcats last season? They won the South with a team that didn't feature a single 2015 NFL Draft pick.

Then there's UCLA, which lost quarterback Brett Hundley, but returns arguably its best overall roster of the Jim Mora era.

"It's competitive as heck," Mora said of the South. "There are no easy games. It's exciting football. It's wide-open, it's aggressive. ... We don't want it to be easy."

This trend actually took root last season, when the South fielded five of its six teams — the four listed above, as well as Utah — in the final AP Top 25.

"We joined the conference four years ago and the conference today is light years ahead of where it was (then)," Utah coach Kyle Whittingham said. "When we joined, there were three or four, five teams that were a little bit down, but there's been a resurgence. The argument is, especially the South, it's as tough a division as there is in all of college football."

Even so, don't totally discard the North.

Even without Heisman Trophy winner Marcus Mariota, Oregon again is expected

CONFERENCE PICKS

PAC-12 NORTH	Good news	Bad news	Our call
1. Oregon	The Ducks have finished in the national Top 10 in scoring the past seven years.	This season they have to do it without Heisman winner Marcus Mariota.	They still have enough firepower to contend for a playoff berth.
2. Stanford	Quarterback Kevin Hogan decided to return for his final season.	The defense never has been more inexperienced under David Shaw.	Playing three of their first four on the road doesn't leave much room for error.
3. California	Jared Goff is about to get the national attention he deserves.	But trying to out-score everyone every week probably won't work..	Even so, the Golden Bears continue to improve under Sonny Dykes.
4. Washington	Chris Petersen's offense couldn't be much worse in Year 2.	His defense — which lost three first-round draft picks — won't be nearly as strong.	The Huskies are still at least a year away from contending.
5. Washington St.	Mike Leach has a capable quarterback in Luke Falk.	He also had one in Connor Halliday and couldn't produce a winning record.	The Cougars might be better than last season, but that's not saying much.
6. Oregon State	Gary Andersen was a great hire after Mike Riley left for Nebraska.	The defense is down nine starters.	This will be a transition season in Corvallis, especially with youth at quarterback.
PAC-12 SOUTH			
1. USC	With Heisman Trophy candidate Cody Kessler, Trojans have national title hopes.	USC has not recently fared well when expectations have been high.	USC, with all that talent, becomes the fourth team in four years to win the South.
2. Arizona State	The Sun Devils return nine starters from Todd Graham's attacking defense.	They lost WRs Jaelen Strong (NFL) and Cameron Smith (knee injury).	This still is a team that won't leave the Top 25.
3. Arizona	In his second season, Anu Solomon will be more seasoned behind center.	Other than Scooby Wright, is there a difference-maker on defense?	The Wildcats take a small step back, but watch out for their fourth-quarter comebacks.
4. UCLA	The Bruins return their entire offensive line.	They lost Brett Hundley, among the most prolific quarterbacks in school history.	A first-year QB isn't the kiss of death — but it sure adds uncertainty to the proceedings.
5. Utah	Trying to tackle Devontae Booker might be the Pac-12's toughest task.	A reported rift between Kyle Whittingham and AD Chris Hill doesn't bode well.	This program has a lot of distractions — too many to move up in South.
6. Colorado	In Nelson Spruce, Colorado has one of the top receivers in the country.	The Buffs still don't have the all-around talent and depth to compete in the South.	Like last season, expect a lot of close losses.

to compete for the Pac-12 championship, as well as one of the sport's four playoff spots. Coach Mark Helfrich may not have a first-round NFL draft pick at quarterback (at least not yet), but he might have the conference's most dynamic talent in sophomore running back Royce Freeman, as well as a strong pass rusher in DeForest Buckner.

Stanford also is expected to bounce back from last season's 8-5 effort, the Cardinal's worst under coach David Shaw. The return of senior quarterback Kevin Hogan, and the expected emergence of sophomore all-purpose threat Christian McCaffrey, will help cover for a defense that might have some growing pains.

And with quarterback Jared Goff, California should continue to climb and may even surprise. Washington might spend another year finding its way, especially with news that receiver/returner John Ross is going to miss the season because of injury, but it's hard to doubt Chris Petersen.

That's why Graham says without hesitation: "Every team is going to be better."

— Doug Haller

HONOR ROLL

Most Accurate Passer	Cody Kessler	USC
Strongest Arm	Mike Bercovici	Arizona State
Best Scrambler	Anu Solomon	Arizona
Coolest in the Clutch	Kevin Hogan	Stanford
Toughest to Bring Down	Devontae Booker	Utah
Best Hands	Nelson Spruce	Colorado
Most Dangerous Deep Threat	Eldridge Massington	UCLA
Best Pass Blocker	Kyle Murphy	Stanford
Best Run Blocker	Christian Westerman	Arizona State
Best Pass Rusher	Hunter Dimick	Utah
Best Cover Corner	Fabian Moreau	UCLA
Special-Teams Demon	Ishmael Adams	UCLA

Most Valuable Player

Royce Freeman
RB, Oregon

Offensive Player of the Year

Cody Kessler
QB, USC

Defensive Player of the Year

Scooby Wright
LB, Arizona

Newcomer of the Year

Josh Rosen
QB, UCLA

Lindy's **ALL-PAC-12 TEAM**

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Cody Kessler	Sr.	USC
RB	Royce Freeman	So.	Oregon
RB	Paul Perkins	Jr.	UCLA
WR	Nelson Spruce	Sr.	Colorado
WR	Cayleb Jones	Jr.	Arizona
TE	Austin Hooper	Jr.	Stanford
C	Max Tuerk	Sr.	USC
OL	Christian Westerman	Sr.	Arizona State
OL	Tyler Johnstone	Sr.	Oregon
OL	Kyle Murphy	Sr.	Stanford
OL	Joshua Garnett	Sr.	Stanford
AP	JuJu Smith	So.	USC
K	Andy Phillips	Jr.	Utah

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	DeForest Buckner	Sr.	Oregon
DL	Josh Tupou	Sr.	Colorado
DL	Kenny Clark	Jr.	UCLA
DL	Hunter Dimick	Jr.	Utah
LB	Scooby Wright	Jr.	Arizona
LB	Myles Jack	Jr.	UCLA
LB	Su'a Cravens	Jr.	USC
DB	Ishmael Adams	Jr.	UCLA
DB	Adoree' Jackson	So.	USC
DB	Jordan Simone	Sr.	Arizona State
DB	Fabian Moreau	Sr.	UCLA
P	Tom Hackett	Sr.	Utah

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Jared Goff	Jr.	California
RB	Nick Wilson	So.	Arizona
RB	Devontae Booker	Sr.	Utah
WR	Byron Marshall	Sr.	Oregon
WR	D.J. Foster	Sr.	Arizona State
TE	Pharaoh Brown	Sr.	Oregon
C	Jake Brendel	Sr.	UCLA
OL	Nick Kelly	Sr.	Arizona State
OL	Vi Teofilo	Sr.	Arizona State
OL	Toa Lobendahn	So.	USC
OL	Chris Borrayo	Jr.	California
AP	Christian McCaffrey	So.	Stanford
K	Zane Gonzalez	Jr.	Arizona State

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Delvon Simmons	Sr.	USC
DL	Eddie Vanderdoes	Jr.	UCLA
DL	Antwaun Woods	Sr.	USC
DL	Lowell Lotulelei	So.	Utah
LB	Viliami Moeakiola	Jr.	Arizona State
LB	Peter Kalambayi	Jr.	Stanford
LB	Joe Walker	Sr.	Oregon
DB	Lloyd Carrington	Sr.	Arizona State
DB	Budda Baker	So.	Washington
DB	Leon McQuay III	Jr.	USC
DB	Kodi Whitfield	Sr.	Stanford
P	Drew Riggleman	Sr.	Arizona

OFFENSE - THIRD TEAM

QB	Kevin Hogan	Sr.	Stanford
RB	Thomas Tyner	Jr.	Oregon
RB	Daniel Lasco	Sr.	California
WR	Victor Bolden	Jr.	Oregon State
WR	Jordan Payton	Sr.	UCLA
TE	Stephen Anderson	Sr.	California
C	Isaac Seumalo	Sr.	Oregon State
OL	Chad Wheeler	Jr.	USC
OL	Conor McDermott	Jr.	UCLA
OL	Viane Talamaivao	So.	USC
OL	Joe Dahl	Sr.	Washington State
AP	Kalen Ballage	So.	Arizona State
K	Cameron Van Winkle	Jr.	Washington

DEFENSE - THIRD TEAM

DL	Elijah Qualls	So.	Washington
DL	Claude Pelon	Sr.	USC
DL	Demetrius Cherry	Sr.	Arizona State
DL	Alex Balducci	Sr.	Oregon
LB	Deon Hollins	Jr.	UCLA
LB	Blake Martinez	Sr.	Stanford
LB	Jared Norris	Sr.	Utah
DB	Kevon Seymour	Sr.	USC
DB	Reggie Daniels	Jr.	Oregon
DB	Randall Goforth	Jr.	UCLA
DB	Zach Hoffpauir	Sr.	Stanford
P	Matt Haack	Jr.	Arizona State

THE BIG ONES

Sept. 3	
Michigan at Utah	We're guessing Jim Harbaugh's return to college will get a few headlines.
Sept. 4	
Washington at Boise State	We're guessing Chris Petersen's return to Boise will get a few headlines.
Sept. 5	
Arizona State vs. Texas A&M (Houston)	The Sun Devils' defense gets tested right off the bat.
Sept. 12	
Oregon at Michigan State	What's life without Marcus Mariota look like? We'll find out.
Oregon State at Michigan	Both Oregon schools play in Michigan on the same day.
Sept. 19	
Stanford at USC	The last two matchups have been settled by a field goal.
California at Texas	This could be Jared Goff's national coming-out party.
Colorado vs. Colorado State (Denver)	Buffs outscored 24-7 in second half of last season's 31-17 loss.
Sept. 25	
Stanford at Oregon State	Conference opener for Beavers coach Gary Andersen.
Sept. 26	
USC at Arizona State	Trojans look to avenge last season's Hail Mary loss.
Oct. 3	
Arizona State at UCLA	The Bruins embarrassed ASU last season, 62-27.
Oct. 15	
UCLA at Stanford	The Cardinal has beaten UCLA seven times in a row.
Oct. 17	
USC at Notre Dame	One of the greatest rivalries in college football.
Oct. 29	
Oregon at Arizona State	The Ducks have won eight in a row over the Sun Devils.
Nov. 7	
California at Oregon	Shootout alert! Last year's regular-season battle produced 100 points.
Nov. 14	
Oregon at Stanford	This is always a must-see showdown, and it likely will settle the North.
Utah at Arizona	Since arriving in the desert, Rich Rodriguez is 3-0 against the Utes.
Nov. 21	
Arizona at Arizona State	Last season this desert rivalry decided the Pac-12 South.
California at Stanford	Stanford has won five in a row, but the gap could be closing.
USC at Oregon	Preview of the Pac-12 championship game?
Nov. 27	
Washington St. at Washington	Leach may need this to avoid a fourth losing season in Pullman.
Oregon State at Oregon	This one will feel different without Mariota and Mannion.
Nov. 28	
Colorado at Utah	Buffaloes have four of their last six on the road.
UCLA at USC	UCLA's QB after last year's win: "UCLA runs L.A."
Notre Dame at Stanford	The Cardinal wrap up the regular-season against the Irish.

DEFOREST BUCKNER

Photo by AP Photo/Troy Wayrynen

BOWL CONNECTIONS

Pac-12 champ

College Football Playoff (Cotton or Orange) if selected among top four teams.

Other league affiliations:

Rose vs. Big Ten
Alamo vs. Big 12
Holiday vs. Big Ten
Foster Farms vs. Big Ten
Sun vs. ACC
Royal Purple Las Vegas vs. MW/BYU
Cactus vs. Big 12

TOP 10 NFL TALENT

1. DeForest Buckner	DL	Sr.	Oregon	Has all the tools — and size — to be a breakout pass rusher.
2. Myles Jack	LB	Jr.	UCLA	Outstanding athlete capable of making impact on both sides.
3. Su'a Cravens	LB	Jr.	USC	Versatile defender who could end up at linebacker or safety.
4. Jared Goff	QB	Jr.	California	Needs to fill out frame, but has first-round potential.
5. Scooby Wright	LB	Jr.	Arizona	Hard-hitting linebacker won last season's Nagurski Award.
6. Kyle Murphy	LT	Sr.	Stanford	Replacing Andrus Peat at left tackle, where he likely will shine.
7. Cody Kessler	QB	Sr.	USC	Kessler threw only five INTs in 452 attempts last season.
8. Devontae Booker	RB	Sr.	Utah	Former junior college transfer runs as hard as anybody.
9. Max Tuerk	C	Sr.	USC	Versatile lineman has started everywhere on the line except right guard.
10. Fabian Moreau	CB	Sr.	UCLA	Still has room to grow, but Mora calls him a potential All-American.

*Only draft-eligible players included.

By Justin Hopkins 247Sports

PAC-12 RECRUITING

USC: USC capitalized on the ability to sign a full class with a bang. The 26 commits helped propel Steve Sarkisian's Trojans to the No. 2 recruiting class in the nation, just behind Alabama. Not only did the Trojans snag up many of the So Cal elite, they also signed star power from four additional states including Florida, Georgia, Texas and Utah. USC signed four linebackers ranked in the top 200 of the 247Sports Composite in Osa Masina, Porter Gustin, John Houston Jr. and Cameron Smith.

UCLA: The battle for L.A. rages on the recruiting trail in addition to the field. While the Trojans won in recruiting, the Bruins continue to win on the field. This class was highlighted by the much-needed addition of five-star, and the nation's No. 1 quarterback, Josh Rosen. Like USC, UCLA was able to recruit nationally, signing players from at least seven different states. A strong finish pushed UCLA up to the No. 12 class nationally in the 247Sports team rankings.

OREGON: Mark Helfrich and company signed a slightly smaller class in 2015 with 22 total commits. But once again, Oregon loaded up on speed and playmakers, signing an elite class of all-purpose backs. The Ducks loaded up along the lines with five defensive linemen, highlighted by five-star Canton Kaumatule. They also loaded up offensively with five offensive linemen commits, led by 247Sports' four-star Brady Aiello.

ARIZONA STATE: ASU continues to climb up the rankings each year and this year it jumped to No. 20 nationally with its 23 commits. Four-star quarterback Brady White is going to inherit a loaded squad when he takes over under offensive coordinator Mike Norvell. Four-star playmakers Stanley Norman and Jaason Lewis could help White flourish at ASU, while top-rated JUCO inside linebacker Davon Durant could make an immediate impact for the Sun Devils.

STANFORD: Stanford checked in at No. 5 despite not signing a quarterback in this class. They did however add an elite wide-out in Hart (Calif.) four-star Trent Irwin. Irwin broke records and impressed at every camp setting along the way. The Cardinal also made an impact with three 247Sports four-stars at cornerback in Frank Buncom, Justin Reid and Quenton Meeks.

WASHINGTON: Despite checking in at No. 6, first-year head coach Chris Petersen did his best to lock down the state. Washington signed six of the state's top players, including the top three in defensive end Benning Potoae, athlete Austin Joyner and offensive tackle Henry Roberts. Record-setting four-star quarterback Jake Browning is the No. 71 overall player in the 247Sports Composite and an ideal fit for a Petersen-led offense at Washington.

CALIFORNIA: There is no question Sonny Dykes will continue his air-raid offensive assault and he got a significant boost with the addition of 247Sports Composite four-star wide receivers Carlos Strickland and Jaylinn Hawkins. Getting the ball to those elite playmakers will be quarterback Ross Bowers' job. What's even more impressive is the Golden Bears' national recruiting approach, which includes signing players from at least nine different states.

ARIZONA: Rich Rod loaded up his class early in the process and rounded out only a few spots after his season kicked off. The Cats were able to hold onto the state's No. 2 player in offensive tackle Keenan Walker. Fellow offensive lineman Cody Creason, a four star, will work to hold the line for Arizona in the future. A major position of need for the Wildcats was in the secondary, where they signed at least seven corners or safeties for help.

WASHINGTON STATE: Despite being well known for his air-raid offense, Mike Leach got defensive. The class was led by defensive tackle Thomas Toki, the No. 4 player in the state of Washington per the 247Sports Composite. Along with Toki, the Cougs solidified their backfield with four big defensive back signings in Shalom Luani, Kameron Powell, Hunter Dale and Darrien Molton.

UTAH: The Utes did an impressive job beating out Nebraska and Oregon for mammoth offensive lineman Darrin Paulo. In fact, Utah signed six offensive linemen in this class to make this a deep position. However, they signed seven wide receivers, led by Los Angeles Harbor College three-star Cory Butler. The Utes signed a quarterback in Chad Hekking with impressive measurables at 6-4, 215-pounds. He could end up being a nice sleeper.

OREGON STATE: The surprise departure of Mike Riley to Nebraska led to Gary Andersen's fortune. The Beavers, although not highly rated, assembled some deadly pieces, including speedster Paul Lucas. Linebacker Christian Folau was a great late pickup by the staff to help close out the recruiting class. The Beavers didn't 'load up' at any one position and instead signed a very balanced class for the first-year head coach.

COLORADO: Headlining this group is in-state offensive lineman Tim Lynott, the No. 2 player in the state of Colorado. 247Sports is especially high on four-star linebacker Nu'umotu Falo from California. If the Buffs are going to turn things around, it's going to be on the shoulders of those two to lead the class, which ranks No. 68 nationally in the 247Sports team rankings.

TOP 20 INCOMING RECRUITS

RK	NAME	HT/WT	POS	HOMETOWN/SCHOOL	COLLEGE
1.	Iman Marshall	6-1/190	CB	Long Beach, Calif./Poly	USC
2.	Josh Rosen	6-4/205	QB	Bellflower, Calif./St. John Bosco	UCLA
3.	Canton Kaumatule	6-7/290	DE	Honolulu, Hawaii/Punahou	Oregon
4.	Keisean Lucier-South	6-4/208	DE	Orange, Calif./Lutheran	UCLA
5.	Rasheem Green	6-5/275	DT	Gardena, Calif./Junipero Serra	USC
6.	Chuma Edoga	6-3/280	OG	Powder Springs, Ga./McEachern	USC
7.	Soso Jamabo	6-2/210	RB	Plano, Texas/West	UCLA
8.	Osa Masina	6-3.5/230	LB	Salt Lake City, Utah/Brighton	USC
9.	Ronald Jones II	6-0/185	RB	McKinney, Texas/North	USC
10.	Porter Gustin	6-5/245	LB	Salem, Utah/Salem Hills	USC
11.	John Houston Jr.	6-3/211	LB	Gardena, Calif./Junipero Serra	USC
12.	Taj Griffin	5-10/175	RB	Powder Springs, Ga./McEachern	Oregon
13.	Marvell Tell	6-1/188	S	Encino, Calif./Crespi	USC
14.	Brady White	6-0/180	QB	Newhall, Calif./Hart	Arizona State
15.	DeChaun Holiday	6-3/195	CB	San Marcos, Calif./Mission Hills	UCLA
16.	Jacob Daniel	6-4/310	DT	Clovis, Calif./North	USC
17.	Trent Irwin	6-1/189	WR	Newhall, Calif./Hart	Stanford
18.	Jake Browning	6-2/185	QB	Folsom, Calif./Folsom	Washington
19.	Ricky Town	6-3/206	QB	Ventura, Calif./St. Bonaventure	USC
20.	Ykili Ross	6-0/175	CB	Riverside, Calif./Polytechnic	USC

NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR: JOSH ROSEN

Josh Rosen was the key for this UCLA class. With Brett Hundley now departed for the NFL, it's a clear path to playing time for the five-star, who was able to enroll early with the Bruins. Drawing comparisons to Troy Aikman with his big-arm will raise expectations for him. Rosen will walk in as QB1 and inherits a loaded stable of talent, including record-chasing receiver Jordan Payton.

TOP SLEEPER: TRENT IRWIN, JAY-JAY WILSON, BRADY AIELLO

Trent Irwin isn't a sleeper in terms of rankings but he might get forgotten about being at Stanford, until he starts playing. Jay-Jay Wilson is a super-gifted, 6-3, 230-pounder that could end up being a major impact at ASU. Oregon signed offensive lineman Brady Aiello, who got a late bump in 247Sports rankings, but could end up being a four-year starter at Oregon.

LIKELY TO BE BEST NFL PLAYER: IMAN MARSHALL

Marshall finished the recruiting season ranked as the No. 4 overall player in the nation, per the 247Sports Composite. At a stout 6-1, 190 pounds, Marshall already looks the part of an NFL corner. He might be one of the most gifted pure-athletes in this class and will have a chance to make an immediate impact at USC this season.

NO. 1 SIGNING COUPS: USC, OREGON

USC assaulted the recruiting world in its first year back after three years of recruiting sanctions and finished less than one point behind No. 1 Alabama. USC signed a slew of five-star recruits, including Iman Marhsall, Rasheem Green and Osa Masina. While Oregon finished No. 3 in the Pac-12, there wasn't a better group of all-purpose backs signed than the Ducks. Led by five-star Taj Griffin, Oregon also signed four-stars Malik Lovette and Kirk Merritt, giving offensive coordinator Scott Frost unmatched offensive firepower.

BIGGEST MISSES: ASU, ARIZONA

ASU and Arizona only signed three of the top 10 in-state players combined. Letting that talent get out of state could haunt both programs. Arizona State also was runner up for five-star linebackers Osa Masina and Porter Gustin, who both signed with USC. The one that could sting the most might be wide receiver Trent Irwin, who decided not to play with high school quarterback teammate Brady White, and instead signed with Stanford.

BEST RECRUITING STAFF: UCLA

It's easy to list USC, but that program, to a degree, sells itself. With the battle for L.A. at an all-time high, Jim Mora has assembled an all-star team of recruiters. Despite only signing 19 recruits in 2015, the Bruins still finished No. 12 in the nation. A huge finish including Soso Jamabo, Chris Clark, DeChaun Holiday and Josh Wariboko pushed the Bruins among the nation's elite.

OREGON | DUCKS

Pac-12 rank: 1 Record: 13-2 Pac-12 record: 8-1 (1st, North) Stadium: Autzen Stadium (54,000)

RANKING 4

DUCKS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Eugene, Ore.
COACH: Mark Helfrich — At Oregon and overall: 24-4, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Scott Frost
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Don Pellum

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2004
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 6 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Jeff Lockie, QB Vernon Adams, RB Royce Freeman, WR Byron Marshall, DT DeForest Buckner, OLB Tyson Coleman, ILB Joe Walker, SS Tyree Robinson

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Oregon is loaded at the skill positions and will be able to put plenty of points on the board. With Freeman and junior Thomas Tyner in the backfield, the Ducks should lead the Pac-12 in rushing again. Despite losing Arik Armstead early to the NFL, the defensive front seven should be improved with a senior-dominated starting lineup and talented young players in the rotation.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Adams will have to learn the offense quickly and win over his teammates if he's going to beat out the respected Lockie for the starting job. Replacing Hroniss Grasu at center might be as difficult as replacing Mariota behind center. The secondary will be loaded with raw freshmen and sophomores, who will have to be ready at Michigan State on Sept. 12.

OFFENSE

Quarterbacks don't usually like the "game manager" label, but that's exactly what offensive coordinator Scott Frost is looking for with so many talented receivers and running backs on the roster. Top candidates Jeff Lockie and touted Eastern Washington transfer Vernon Adams won't have to have Heisman moments for the Ducks to win big again.

Royce Freeman and Thomas Tyner comprise one of the nation's top running back tandems. Frost also plans to find some touches for dynamic redshirt freshman Tony Brooks-James, who was the talk of spring practices and moonlighted on the track team.

At wide receiver, Bralon Addison returns from injury to join Byron Marshall and Dwayne Stanford as the likely starters. Darren Carrington (facing an NCAA suspension) and Devon Allen (recovering from a torn ACL) are All-Pac-12 caliber players who could help Oregon make a stretch run.

The offensive line lost left tackle Jake Fisher and center Hroniss Grasu to the NFL, but returning left tackle Tyler Johnstone is expected to be back at full strength from injury, and sophomore right tackle Tyrell Crosby could develop into an all-time Oregon player.

DEFENSE

The unit improved throughout the 2014 season, including frustrating Jameis Winston during a Rose Bowl romp over Florida State, but the lasting image of the Ducks was Ohio State's Ezekiel Elliot gashing them during the national championship game.

Oregon's front seven should be improved with the return of DeForest Buckner and Alex Balducci up front and four senior linebackers in the starting lineup. Tui Talia, T.J. Daniel, Henry Mondeaux and Austin Maloata add some quality depth along the defensive line. The strength of the defense is the mix of experience and young talent at linebacker.

Impressive recent recruiting in the secondary will pay off this fall after the graduation of All-American cornerback Ifo Ekpre-Olomu, safety Erick Dargan (led Oregon with 95 tackles, seven interceptions) and starting cornerback Troy Hill (team-high 18 pass break-ups). Cornerbacks Chris Seisay and Arrion Springs, and safeties Tyree Robinson and Reggie Daniels, are penciled in as the starters.

The wild card is potential two-way star Charles Nelson, who practiced with the defensive backs all spring and caught five passes for 144 yards and two touchdowns in the spring game.

ROYCE FREEMAN
Photo by Joe Robbins

"We're ready to move forward and we're going to excel no matter who we have on the field."

— LT Tyler Johnstone, on the post-Mariota era

SPECIAL TEAMS

Place-kickers Matt Wogan (7 of 9 on field goal attempts) and Aiden Schneider (11 of 12) will continue to compete on a weekly basis. The Ducks don't like to punt, but when they do, Ian Wheeler (39.1-yard average) is solid.

OVERVIEW

Despite Marcus Mariota's departure to the NFL, the Ducks will have a chance to repeat as Pac-12 champions. There are some difficult road hurdles to clear (at Michigan State, Arizona State and Stanford), but South Division favorite USC visits Autzen Stadium (Nov. 21).

The Ducks definitely can fly into the College Football Playoff again, but it will take a quarterback who can manage the "blur" offense, and more improvement on defense in Don Pellum's second season as coordinator.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Canton Kaumatule: The Ducks are hoping the top newcomer will be Vernon Adams, but in the spring the most impressive new player was Kaumatule, a 6-7, 295-pound defensive lineman from Honolulu. The true freshman, a five-star recruit, had five tackles, including two sacks, in the spring game.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	3	Vernon Adams Jr.	6-0	200	Sr.
RB	21	**Royce Freeman***	5-11	230	So.
WR	88	**Dwayne Stanford***	6-5	205	Jr.
WR	9	**Byron Marshall***	5-10	200	Sr.
WR	2	Bralon Addison	5-10	190	Jr.
TE	81	**Evan Baylis***	6-6	250	Jr.
LT	64	Tyler Johnstone	6-6	295	Sr.
LG	62	Matt Pierson	6-6	285	Sr.
C	76	Jake Pisarcik	6-2	300	So.
RG	78	**Cameron Hunt***	6-4	290	Jr.
RT	73	**Tyrell Crosby***	6-5	310	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	44	**DeForest Buckner***	6-7	290	Sr.
NG	56	**Alex Balducci***	6-4	310	Sr.
DE	45	T.J. Daniel	6-6	275	Jr.
LB	96	Christian French	6-5	250	Sr.
LB	48	**Rodney Hardrick***	6-1	245	Sr.
LB	35	**Joe Walker***	6-2	240	Sr.
LB	33	**Tyson Coleman***	6-1	235	Sr.
CB	12	Chris Seisay	6-1	190	So.
CB	1	Arrion Springs	5-11	205	So.
SS	3	Tyree Robinson	6-4	205	So.
FS	8	**Reggie Daniels***	6-1	205	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	41	**Aidan Schneider***	6-4	235	So.
P	38	**Ian Wheeler***	6-0	205	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	EASTERN WASHINGTON
Sept. 12	at Michigan State
Sept. 19	GEORGIA STATE
Sept. 26	UTAH
Oct. 3	at Colorado
Oct. 10	WASHINGTON STATE
Oct. 17	at Washington
Oct. 29	at Arizona State
Nov. 7	CALIFORNIA
Nov. 14	at Stanford
Nov. 21	USC
Nov. 27	OREGON STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	SOUTH DAKOTA	62-13
W	MICHIGAN STATE	46-27
W	WYOMING	48-14
W	at Washington State	38-31
L	ARIZONA	24-31
W	at UCLA	42-30
W	WASHINGTON	45-20
W	vs. California (Santa Clara, CA)	59-41
W	STANFORD	45-16
W	at Utah	51-27
W	COLORADO	44-10
W	at Oregon State	47-19
	PAC-12 Championship Game	
W	vs. Arizona	51-13
	Rose Bowl - Semifinal	
W	vs. Florida State	59-20
	National Championship Game	
L	vs. Ohio State	20-42

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	45.4	4
Rushing	234.5	20
Passing	312.5	10
Total	547.0	3
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	23.6	30
Rushing	165.4	60
Passing	264.3	108
Total	429.7	87
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 23	+ 1.53	1

USC | TROJANS

Pac-12 rank: 2 Record: 9-4 Pac-12 record: 6-3 (T-2nd, South) Stadium: L.A. Coliseum (93,607)

RANKING 11

TROJANS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Los Angeles, Calif.
COACH: Steve Sarkisian — At USC: 9-4, 1 year; overall: 44-33, 6 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Clay Helton
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Justin Wilcox

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2008
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2011
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 7 offense, 6 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Cody Kessler, WR JuJu Smith, C Max Tuerk, LG Toa Lobendahn, NT Antwaun Woods, LB Su'a Cravens, CB-WR Adoree Jackson, CB Kevon Seymour

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Kessler is a fifth-year senior and expected to be more daring now that he is comfortable running Sarkisian's offense. He will not lack targets. The offensive line returns every starter, including two true sophomores: Lobendahn and Viane Talamaivao. Cravens makes plays all over the field and could lead USC in sacks and interceptions.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Does USC have a dependable tailback? There is also a lack of depth at tight end. Jalen Cope-Fitzpatrick was the only scholarship tight end in spring practice after Bryce Dixon was suspended. Another question mark is safety, where freshmen Ykili Ross and Marvell Tell might start.

CODY KESSLER
Photo by John Pyle/Cal Sport Media

OFFENSE

It might be hard to criticize quarterback Cody Kessler — he did throw 39 touchdown passes, with only five interceptions last season — but USC coach Steve Sarkisian wants Kessler to be more aggressive.

That might mean more interceptions, but also more big plays, especially in key games.

Even though USC lost Nelson Agholor, Kessler has an explosive go-to receiver in sophomore JuJu Smith. Sophomore Steven Mitchell is small but fast and enjoyed a strong spring. Kessler is going to have two 6-4 junior college transfers (Isaac Whitney, De'Quan Hampton) if he needs a big target.

Tailback U. looks like Tailback Who ... at least to start the year. Tre Madden is physical and athletic, but he sat out last season with a fractured toe. Justin Davis could start, but has been inconsistent. The most intriguing back is freshman Ronald Jones, who originally committed to Oklahoma State.

The area that is strongest is the offensive line, where six players started at least part of last season. Max Tuerk will be one of the nation's top centers. Toa Lobendahn started at guard and tackle, making him the team's most versatile lineman.

DEFENSE

USC fans were frustrated that coordinator Justin Wilcox did not blitz more, as the team squandered games late against Boston College, Arizona State and Utah. And the Trojans no longer have first-round defensive lineman Leonard Williams to disrupt offenses.

But linebacker Su'a Cravens provided plenty of highlights last season with his ability to rush the quarterback and cover receivers; he could make Wilcox more daring with his play-calling. Cravens is the defense's top playmaker and will be a true linebacker after also playing safety last season.

Delvon Simmons and Claude Pelon will try to replace Williams — or at least maintain a high quality of play along the line. Veteran nose tackle Antwaun Woods returns following surgery for a torn chest muscle.

A wild-card could be linebacker Lamar Dawson, who started three years, but redshirted in 2014 after tearing knee ligaments. Linebacker Anthony Sarao is the top returning tackler (74).

Cornerback Adoree' Jackson did not allow a touchdown pass until the Holiday Bowl and should get his wish to play more offense, as freshman Iman Marshall is expected to help out at corner. Senior cornerback Kevon Seymour enjoyed a strong spring, too.

> "They have the talent to win the Pac-12. Now they need to make the in-game decisions to win it."
> — Opposing Pac-12 coach on USC

SPECIAL TEAMS

Four-year starting place-kicker Andre Heidari is gone, and Matt Boermeester is the frontrunner to replace him. He and Alex Wood each made 54-yard field goal attempts in USC's spring game. Punter Kris Albarado returns after he averaged 41.4 yards per attempt last season. Jackson will be fun to watch on kick and punt returns.

OVERVIEW

It's all coming together for USC in Sarkisian's second season — star senior quarterback, strong offensive line, defensive playmakers, USC-level athletes, a deeper roster. The Trojans should be pursuing the biggest college football prizes, but the margin of error in the Pac-12 South is slim.

TOP NEWCOMER

DB Iman Marshall: The No. 1-ranked prep cornerback in the country according to the 247Sports Composite rankings, is even more valuable in the pass-happy Pac-12. The secondary needs him now, especially when the Trojans play nickel. Even with Adoree' Jackson and Kevon Seymour at corner, Marshall is expected to see significant action.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	6	Cody Kessler*	6-1	215	Sr.
RB	22	Justin Davis	6-1	195	Jr.
WR	9	JuJu Smith*	6-2	215	So.
WR	1	Darreus Rogers	6-1	215	Jr.
WR	7	Steven Mitchell	5-10	190	So.
TE	88	Jalen Cope-Fitzpatrick	6-4	245	Jr.
LT	72	Chad Wheeler*	6-7	280	Jr.
LG	50	Toa Lobendahn*	6-3	280	So.
C	75	Max Tuerk*	6-6	285	Sr.
RG	60	Viane Talamaivao*	6-2	320	So.
RT	73	Zach Banner*	6-9	360	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	90	Claude Pelon	6-4	300	Sr.
NT	99	Antwaun Woods*	6-1	320	Sr.
DT	52	Delvon Simmons*	6-5	295	Sr.
DE	47	Scott Felix	6-2	240	Jr.
LB	21	Su'a Cravens*	6-1	225	Jr.
LB	56	Anthony Sarao*	6-0	235	Sr.
LB	55	Lamar Dawson	6-1	230	Sr.
CB	13	Kevon Seymour*	6-0	185	Sr.
CB	2	Adoree' Jackson*	5-11	185	So.
S	24	John Plattenburg	5-11	185	So.
S	22	Leon McQuay III	6-1	190	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	39	Matt Boermeester	6-0	180	So.
P	35	Kris Albarado*	5-10	200	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	ARKANSAS STATE
Sept. 12	IDAHO
Sept. 19	STANFORD
Sept. 26	at Arizona State
Oct. 8	WASHINGTON
Oct. 17	at Notre Dame
Oct. 24	UTAH
Oct. 31	at California
Nov. 7	ARIZONA
Nov. 13	at Colorado
Nov. 21	at Oregon
Nov. 28	UCLA

2014 RESULTS

W	FRESNO STATE	52-13
W	at Stanford	13-10
L	at Boston College	31-37
W	OREGON STATE	35-10
L	ARIZONA STATE	34-38
W	at Arizona	28-26
W	COLORADO	56-28
L	at Utah	21-24
W	at Washington State	44-77
W	CALIFORNIA	38-30
L	at UCLA	20-38
W	NOTRE DAME	49-14
	Holiday Bowl	
W	vs. Nebraska	45-42

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	35.8	T-22
Rushing	160.9	66
Passing	296.6	15
Total	457.5	29
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	25.2	45
Rushing	133.4	26
Passing	274.5	115
Total	407.9	T-76
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 11	+ 0.85	11

ARIZONA STATE | SUN DEVILS

Pac-12 rank: 3 Record: 10-3 Pac-12 record: 6-3 (T-2nd, South) Stadium: Sun Devil Stadium (65,870)

RANKING 14

SUN DEVILS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Tempe, Ariz.
COACH: Todd Graham — At Arizona State: 28-12, 3 years; overall: 77-41, nine years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Norvell
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Keith Patterson

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1996
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2010
RETURNING STARTERS: 17; 6 offense, 9 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Mike Bercovici, WR D.J. Foster, C Nick Kelly, OL Christian Westerman, RB Demario Richard, LB Viliami Moeakiola, CB Lloyd Carrington, S Jordan Simone

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: ASU returns nine starters from a defense that ranked sixth in the Pac-12 in scoring defense and 13th nationally in sacks per game. Behind Moeakiola and three-year starter Salamo Fiso, Graham thinks this is the best group of linebackers he's had in Tempe. Simone and Carrington have all-conference potential.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: ASU lost its best receiver (Jaelen Strong) to the NFL and its top deep threat (Cameron Smith) to a season-ending knee injury. The Sun Devils will need Foster — a running back for most of his ASU career — to produce at receiver. Graduate transfer Devin Lucien — who played his first three seasons at UCLA — also will need to play a big role.

D.J. FOSTER
Photo by Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

"We're bigger, faster and stronger. They understand how we do things. These guys get it."

— Todd Graham

OFFENSE

Arizona State has fielded a top 20 scoring offense in all three of coach Todd Graham's seasons. The Sun Devils expect a fourth this year.

It's not often a team upgrades after losing a three-year starter at quarterback, but that might be the case. Senior Mike Bercovici takes over for Taylor Kelly, who exhausted his eligibility after an injury-plagued senior season.

With Kelly out, Bercovici started three times last season, defeating USC (on a last-second Hail Mary) and Stanford. By season's end, he was the fan's choice, a strong-armed quarterback capable of producing miracles.

The Sun Devils have questions at receiver. They lost All-Pac-12 selection Jaelen Strong to the NFL Draft and deep threat Cameron Smith to a season-ending knee injury. The Sun Devils moved playmaker D.J. Foster (163 career catches, mostly as a running back) to receiver full time. They also added UCLA graduate transfer Devin Lucien, who last season had 29 catches for 225 yards and two touchdowns.

The backfield is diverse and talented. Demario Richard (478 rushing yards) emerged late last season as ASU's lead back, rare for a freshman. Sophomore Kalen Ballage was the offense's breakout star of the spring and junior college transfer De'Chavon Hayes provides a home-run threat.

DEFENSE

After a slow start last season, the Sun Devils returned to their attacking ways, finishing in the top 15 in sacks per game for the third season in a row.

This season, ASU returns nine starters and Graham again plans to turn up the heat. Last season, ASU coaches counted three plays that kept them from a Pac-12 South championship — two long runs at Oregon State and another long run at Arizona. As a result, this season's focus is on eliminating big plays.

The Sun Devils return all four starting linebackers, including spur Viliami Moeakiola, perhaps last season's most valuable defensive player. Cornerback Lloyd Carrington and safety Jordan Simone have all-conference potential. The defensive line is deep.

A blow: ASU suspended five-star junior college linebacker Davon Durant following his arrest on allegations of aggravated assault and domestic violence. He might not return.

SPECIAL TEAMS

In March, Graham hired Shawn Slocum — former special-teams coordinator for the Green Bay Packers — to run ASU's special units. A change was needed. The Sun Devils have struggled on special teams throughout Graham's stay in Tempe. They return kicker Zane Gonzalez — a second-team All-Pac-12 selection — and punter Matt Haack.

OVERVIEW

ASU has won 28 games the last three seasons, a total that trails only Oregon (36), Stanford (31) and UCLA (29) in the Pac-12. The Sun Devils have posted back-to-back 10-win seasons for the first time since 1973. Yet, Graham is not satisfied. He wants ASU to go from conference contenders to national contenders. The Sun Devils — who open against Texas A&M in Houston — have the schedule to contend. They also may have the firepower.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB De'Chavon Hayes: Nicknamed "Gump" because of his Forrest Gump-like speed, Hayes is a big-play threat every time he touches the ball. Hayes, a junior college transfer, redshirted last season but burned ASU's defense during bowl and spring practices.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	2	Mike Bercovici	6-1	204	Sr.
RB	**4**	**Demario Richard***	**5-10**	**213**	**So.**
WR	**8**	**D.J. Foster***	**5-11**	**195**	**Sr.**
WR	81	Gary Chambers	6-4	211	Sr.
WRN/A		Devin Lucien	6-1	200	Sr.
TE	**83**	**Kody Kohl***	**6-3**	**230**	**Jr.**
LT	57	Evan Goodman	6-4	314	Jr.
LG	**55**	**Christian Westerman***	**6-4**	**301**	**Sr.**
C	**50**	**Nick Kelly***	**6-2**	**294**	**Sr.**
RG	**73**	**Vi Teofilo***	**6-3**	**304**	**Sr.**
RT	75	William McGehee	6-6	312	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	**97**	**Edmond Boateng***	**6-3**	**256**	**Jr.**
DT	**94**	**Demetrius Cherry***	**6-5**	**298**	**Sr.**
DT	**90**	**Tashon Smallwood***	**6-0**	**285**	**So.**
LB	44	Alani Latu	6-3	256	So.
LB	**28**	**Viliami Moeakiola***	**6-1**	**212**	**Jr.**
LB	**32**	**Antonio Longino***	**6-2**	**229**	**Sr.**
LB	**58**	**Salamo Fiso***	**6-1**	**236**	**Jr.**
CB	**8**	**Lloyd Carrington***	**6-0**	**194**	**Sr.**
CB	**10**	**Kweishi Brown***	**6-0**	**206**	**Sr..**
BS	**38**	**Jordan Simone***	**6-0**	**193**	**Sr.**
FS	18	James Johnson	6-1	192	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	5	Zane Gonzalez*	6-1	189	Jr.
P	26	Matt Haack*	6-1	199	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	vs. Texas A&M (Houston, TX)
Sept. 12	CAL POLY
Sept. 18	NEW MEXICO
Sept. 26	USC
Oct. 3	at UCLA
Oct. 10	COLORADO
Oct. 17	at Utah
Oct. 29	OREGON
Nov. 7	at Washington State
Nov. 14	WASHINGTON
Nov. 21	ARIZONA
Nov. 28	at California

2014 RESULTS

W	WEBER STATE	45-14
W	at New Mexico	58-23
W	at Colorado	38-24
L	UCLA	27-62
W	at USC	38-34
W	STANFORD	26-10
W	at Washington	24-10
W	UTAH (OT)	19-16
W	NOTRE DAME	55-31
L	at Oregon State	27-35
W	WASHINGTON STATE	52-31
L	at Arizona	35-42
	Sun Bowl	
W	vs. Duke	36-31

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	36.9	T-16
Rushing	168.8	56
Passing	273.5	32
Total	442.3	34
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.9	74
Rushing	157.4	49
Passing	259.7	103
Total	417.1	81
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 14	+ 1.08	6

ARIZONA | WILDCATS

Pac-12 rank: 4 Record: 10-4 overall Pac-12: 7-2 (1st, South) Stadium: Arizona Stadium (56,037)

RANKING 19

WILDCATS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Tucson, Ariz.
COACH: Rich Rodriguez — At Arizona: 26-14, 3 years; overall: 146-98-2, 21 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Calvin Magee, Rod Smith
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jeff Casteel

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1993, Pac-10 co-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2011
RETURNING STARTERS: 14, 6 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Anu Solomon, RB Nick Wilson, WR Cayleb Jones, WR Samajie Grant, DE Reggie Gilbert, LB Scooby Wright, S Will Parks, CB Cam Denson

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Arizona can deploy Wright all over the defensive front, and he was devastating as a third-down pass-rusher last season. The receiving corps should be among the best in the nation and will get a further jolt from incoming freshmen. The spring provided solid answers to the loss of four-year starters at OT — Cal transfer Freddie Tagaloa on the left side, versatile Lene Maiava on the right.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Rodriguez hasn't had enough depth in his first three seasons, but he'll have to dig deeper to survive a grinder of a schedule — 12 games in 12 weeks. The secondary loses tough-guy safety Jared Tevis and playmaker Tra'Mayne Bondurant, who had a hand in 10 turnovers last season. Depth at running back and quarterback is a concern.

SCOOBY WRIGHT
Photo by Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

"He's really composed back there. He's just sitting back, relaxing, like he's watching a movie, eating some popcorn."
— S Will Parks
on QB Anu Solomon

OFFENSE

Arizona has a trio of skill position players that rank among the best in the country.

Quarterback Anu Solomon is coming off a mostly successful debut, leading the nation's freshmen with 3,793 passing yards. While his season ended badly — he took a sack in the final seconds with no timeouts left and Arizona perched near the goal line in a Fiesta Bowl loss to Boise State — he generally received high marks for decision-making and his cool-cat command.

He's not the traditional Rich Rodriguez athlete at quarterback, but Solomon is working on being at least something of a threat in the zone-read offense to keep defenses honest.

Nick Wilson emerged as the primary running back as a true freshman, rushing for 1,375 yards and 16 touchdowns, showing many of the same read-and-react skills of his predecessor, All-American Ka'Deem Carey. Wilson's top-end speed is a tick faster than Carey's, too.

Rodriguez has a deep collection of receivers in various shapes and sizes. None is better than 6-3 junior Cayleb Jones, a former five-star recruit who started his career at Texas. Jones (73 catches, 1,019 yards, nine TDs) is a threat on the outside, while little guys Samajie Grant and Nate Phillips, both juniors, could post 50 catches with ease.

DEFENSE

Junior linebacker Scooby Wright is coming off one of the greatest defensive seasons in school history — 163 tackles, 29 for loss, 14 sacks, six forced fumbles, multiple national awards — but he needs more help.

Arizona hasn't been able to generate much pass rush from its three-man front, although the return of defensive end Reggie Gilbert — granted a medical redshirt after last season — solidifies the line. Parker Zellers was something of a revelation last season as a 247-pound redshirt freshman walk-on at nose tackle. Coaches love his competitiveness and instincts.

Multiple mix-and-match candidates can line up with the high-motor Wright at linebacker. Derrick Turituri (6-1, 265) is a big-body answer and is coming off a good spring.

Senior safety Will Parks becomes the leader of a rebuilding secondary. Proven depth is lacking at cornerback, but sophomore Cam Denson, moving into a starting role, has loads of potential. And the conversion of receiver Davonte' Neal to cornerback was a positive spring experiment.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Casey Skowron had an eventful junior season, making 20 of 28 field-goal attempts, including a 47-yard game-winner against Washington that came a month after he missed a 36-yarder that would have beaten USC. Senior Drew Riggleman, adding consistency to his big leg, averaged 46.1 yards per punt last season.

OVERVIEW

Arizona doesn't have the five-star talent of USC and UCLA, but it does all the not-in-the-box-score things well: Plays hard, plays fast, wears down the opponents, never stops believing. All that helped the Wildcats be 6-2 in games decided by one possession and win the South last season. A repeat is a lot to ask, but it's easy to see that this rising program will keep knocking on the door.

TOP NEWCOMER

LT Freddie Tagaloa: The transfer from Cal had to sit out last season, but he immediately stepped into the starting lineup this spring, replacing four-year starter Mickey Baucus. Rich Rodriguez jokes that he wants the physically imposing Tagaloa (6-8, 316) to be the first guy off the bus on road trips.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	12	**Anu Solomon***	6-2	205	So.
RB	28	**Nick Wilson***	5-10	199	So.
WR	1	**Cayleb Jones***	6-3	215	Jr.
WR	10	**Samajie Grant***	5-9	177	Jr.
WR	6	Nate Phillips	5-7	180	Jr.
WR	4	David Richards	6-4	213	Sr.
LT	72	Freddie Tagaloa	6-8	316	Jr.
LG	61	**Cayman Bundage***	6-2	281	Sr.
C	66	Carter Wood	6-2	274	Sr.
RG	78	**Jacob Alsadek***	6-7	298	So.
RT	77	Lene Maiava	6-5	301	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	8	**Reggie Gilbert***	6-4	262	Sr.
NT	93	**Parker Zellers***	6-1	247	So.
DT	60	Luca Bruno	6-4	264	So.
LB	45	Derrick Turituri	6-1	265	Jr.
LB	33	**Scooby Wright***	6-1	246	Jr.
LB	47	Jake Matthews	6-3	221	Jr.
CB	29	**Jarvis McCall***	6-2	182	So.
CB	3	Cam Denson	5-11	168	So.
S	11	**Will Parks***	6-1	194	Sr.
S	1	Tellas Jones	6-0	189	Jr.
FS	7	Jamar Allah	6-1	186	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	41	**Casey Skowron***	5-10	160	Sr.
P	39	**Drew Riggleman***	6-4	213	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	UTSA
Sept. 12	at Nevada
Sept. 19	NORTHERN ARIZONA
Sept. 26	UCLA
Oct. 3	at Stanford
Oct. 10	OREGON STATE
Oct. 17	at Colorado
Oct. 24	WASHINGTON STATE
Oct. 31	at Washington
Nov. 7	at USC
Nov. 14	UTAH
Nov. 21	at Arizona State

2014 RESULTS

W	UNLV	58-13
W	at UTSA	26-23
W	NEVADA	35-28
W	CALIFORNIA	49-45
W	at Oregon	31-24
L	USC	26-28
W	at Washington State	59-37
L	at UCLA	7-17
W	COLORADO	38-20
W	WASHINGTON	27-26
W	at Utah	42-10
W	ARIZONA STATE	42-35
	PAC-12 Championship Game	
L	vs. Oregon	13-51
	Fiesta Bowl	
L	vs. Boise State	30-38

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	34.5	28
Rushing	181.9	45
Passing	281.7	21
Total	463.6	25
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	28.2	78
Rushing	169.8	68
Passing	281.2	118
Total	451.0	103
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 8	+ 0.57	26

UCLA | BRUINS

Pac-12 rank: 5 Record: 10-3 Pac-12 record: 6-3 (T-2nd, South) Stadium: Rose Bowl (92,542)

RANKING 20

BRUINS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Los Angeles
COACH: Jim Mora — At UCLA and overall: 29-11, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Noel Mazzone
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tom Bradley

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1998
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2010
RETURNING STARTERS: 19; 9 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Josh Rosen, RB Paul Perkins, WR Jordan Payton, OL Jake Brendel, NT Kenny Clark, DE Eddie Vanderdoes, LB Myles Jack, CB Ishmael Adams

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Shockingly, the offensive line. The fruits of UCLA's recruiting labor are beginning to be realized, as the Bruins have legitimate size, strength and depth up front. Add in some electric offensive players and a defense that has taken leaps in its athleticism in the last few years, and UCLA has the raw material to win the Pac-12.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The loss of QB Brett Hundley could be mitigated by strides up front, but still, putting the keys to a potential top-10 team in the hands of a true freshman is always a worry, even if the freshman is Josh Rosen. A bigger question mark is who fills the shoes of Eric Kendricks, the Bruins' most reliable defender for four years?

MYLES JACK
Photo by John Pyle/Cal Sport Media

"The thing that impressed me about our team this spring was the level of maturity we showed."
— Jim Mora, after UCLA's spring game

OFFENSE

UCLA bids goodbye to one-time Heisman candidate Brett Hundley after three fruitful seasons, but with Josh Rosen picking up the reins, there is room for optimism.

Optimism that the learning curve for the true freshman quarterback will be sped up because of his advanced football mind, and optimism because, finally, he may stay upright.

That was always a test for Hundley, who broke the century mark in career sacks at UCLA. He was thrust from the pocket more than loose change, playing behind an offensive line that dealt with myriad youth and injury issues. That offensive line is now a surprisingly seasoned lot, led by a steady anchor in center Jake Brendel.

Jim Mora and Co. might wait until mid-fall to officially name Rosen as starter, but that's only to ease him into the role. Junior running back Paul Perkins will play a factor in that, too.

Perkins returns after a Pac-12-leading 1,575-yard, nine-touchdown season, the second-highest rushing yardage ranking in team history.

The Bruins lack explosiveness on the perimeter, but seasoned wideouts Jordan Payton, Eldridge Massington, Thomas Duarte and Devin Fuller form a solid group, and incoming touted tight end Chris Clark provides a new look.

DEFENSE

The Bruins' defense might be even more complete than the offense. New coordinator Tom Bradley, a mainstay at Penn State for three decades, inherits a unit with plenty of star power, with potentially three first-round picks.

Two of them play up front — defensive tackle Eddie Vanderdoes and nose tackle Kenny Clark, potentially the toughest 1-2 punch at the line of scrimmage in the league. Takkarist McKinley emerged as a solid rotational player last season after transferring from junior college, and he should benefit playing alongside Vanderdoes and Clark.

The third potential first-round pick is dual-threat Myles Jack, who takes over for Eric Kendricks as the leader of the linebacker corps and will likely continue to see at least a few carries on the offensive side. Jack is UCLA's only certifiable star on the second line as of now, but Kenny Young and Deon Hollins could become household names in the Pac-12 this season.

UCLA's defensive backfield is led by a shining star — first-team all-conference pick Ishmael Adams — but Fabian Moreau and Jaleel Wadood are ready for their moments.

SPECIAL TEAMS

UCLA's kicking game used to be its biggest strength. That's as much an endorsement of the special teams as an indictment of the rest of the team. Curiously, the kicking game has dipped, though, and UCLA hopes Ka'imi Fairbairn becomes a bit more consistent from deep.

OVERVIEW

UCLA has become one of the Pac-12's true contenders, but the Bruins are attempting to make a major leap this season. The schedule looks manageable and expectations are high. UCLA has the talent to challenge for the Pac-12 title. One question lingers: Can the Bruins overcome youth at the most important position?

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Josh Rosen: Considered UCLA's top quarterback recruit in program history, the local product from Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco High is projected to start from Day 1. He has a redshirt senior's feel for the offense as a true freshman, one who graduated early to participate in spring ball.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	3	Josh Rosen	6-4	205	Fr.
RB	24	**Paul Perkins***	5-11	198	Jr.
WR	9	**Jordan Payton***	6-1	213	Sr.
WR	18	**Thomas Duarte***	6-3	223	Jr.
WR	7	Devin Fuller	6-0	195	Sr.
WR	82	**Eldridge Massington***	6-3	210	So.
LT	68	**Conor McDermott***	6-9	295	Jr.
LG	51	**Alex Redmond***	6-5	297	Jr.
C	54	**Jake Brendel***	6-4	290	Sr.
RG	52	**Scott Quessenberry***	6-4	280	Jr.
RT	74	**Caleb Benenoch***	6-5	305	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	98	Takkarist McKinley	6-4	230	Jr.
NT	97	**Kenny Clark***	6-3	308	Jr.
DT	47	**Eddie Vanderdoes***	6-3	305	Jr.
LB	30	**Myles Jack***	6-1	232	Jr.
LB	44	Isaako Savaiinaea	6-2	233	Jr.
LB	42	**Kenny Young***	6-2	230	So.
CB	10	**Fabian Moreau***	6-0	195	Sr.
CB	1	**Ishmael Adams***	5-8	190	Jr.
NB	21	**Tahaan Goodman***	6-1	190	Jr.
S	2	**Jaleel Wadood***	5-10	175	So.
FS	3	Randall Goforth	5-10	182	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	15	**Ka'imi Fairbairn***	6-0	185	Sr.
P	19	**Matt Mengel***	6-2	210	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	VIRGINIA
Sept. 12	at UNLV
Sept. 19	BYU
Sept. 26	at Arizona
Oct. 3	ARIZONA STATE
Oct. 15	at Stanford
Oct. 22	CALIFORNIA
Oct. 31	COLORADO
Nov. 7	at Oregon State
Nov. 14	WASHINGTON STATE
Nov. 21	at Utah
Nov. 28	at USC

2014 RESULTS

W	at Virginia	28-20
W	MEMPHIS	42-35
W	vs. Texas (Arlington, TX)	20-17
W	at Arizona State	62-27
L	UTAH	28-30
L	OREGON	30-42
W	at California	36-34
W	at Colorado (2OT)	40-37
W	ARIZONA	17-7
W	at Washington	44-30
W	USC	38-28
L	STANFORD	10-31
	Alamo Bowl	
W	vs. Kansas State	40-35

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	33.5	T-34
Rushing	209.5	32
Passing	258.3	42
Total	467.8	22
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	28.1	T-75
Rushing	147.9	42
Passing	250.6	93
Total	398.5	63
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 0	+ 0.00	T-59

STANFORD | CARDINAL

Pac-12 rank: 6 Record: 8-5 Pac-12 record: 5-4 (2nd, North) Stadium: Stanford (50,000)

RANKING 26

CARDINAL at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Stanford, Calif.
COACH: David Shaw — At Stanford: 42-12, 4 years; overall: 42-12, 4 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Bloomgren
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Lance Anderson

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2013
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2008
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 9 offense, 4 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Kevin Hogan, RB Christian McCaffrey, WR Devon Cajuste, TE Austin Hooper, OT Kyle Murphy, LB Kevin Anderson, LB Blake Martinez, S Zach Hoffpauir

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Hogan is an experienced hand at quarterback, and he should be among the league's best. McCaffrey, a sophomore, is an exciting, versatile athlete who is ready for full-time duty after coaches limited him to certain packages last season. The linebacker corps is one of the best in the league.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Hogan lost his big-game mojo last season, with three of the team's five losses coming by a field goal. Speaking of which, the kicking game could be suspect. The schedule is favorable overall, but Stanford opens league play at USC.

KEVIN HOGAN
Photo by Dave Sizer

OFFENSE

Stanford lacked its traditional workhorse running back last year, resulting in its worst rushing attack since former coach Jim Harbaugh's first season in 2007. The Cardinal finished just 70th nationally, at 158.8 rushing yards per game, after ranking in the top 25 for six straight years.

It was a group effort on the ground last year and figures to be again with Remound Wright, Barry Sanders and the versatile Christian McCaffrey returning. The group will have to produce more for Stanford to operate the way it wants to offensively, although four returning starters on the offensive line helps.

The one loss was big, though. Left tackle Andrus Peat left early for the NFL and went No. 13 overall to New Orleans. Second-team All-Pac-12 selection Kyle Murphy will flip over from the right side to replace him.

Quarterback Kevin Hogan is the offense's leader, and the fifth-year senior will dictate much of the team's potential success. He's been an up-and-down performer throughout his career, but is 24-8 as a starter.

His top targets are wide receiver Devon Cajuste, who led Stanford with six touchdown catches last year, and tight end Austin Hooper. If Hogan can be more consistent and manage the offense well, Stanford's offense might be its leading unit.

DEFENSE

There were some early concerns about a defense that returns only four starters. With injuries and safety Zach Hoffpauir playing baseball, spring concluded with just one starter (linebacker Blake Martinez) participating in the spring game.

That made the defense's domination in the annual scrimmage that much more impressive, as it allowed just one touchdown on 16 possessions. Martinez was the team's leading tackler last year with 102, outside linebacker Kevin Anderson had 5.5 sacks, and linebacker Peter Kalambayi will have a bigger role after making 6.5 sacks in limited time as a pass-rushing demon.

> "It got down to who could execute, and the defense executed better."
> — David Shaw on his defense's domination of the spring game

So there are some playmakers out there.

The Cardinal led the Pac-12 in total defense last year, but that was before four players went in the first five rounds of the NFL Draft and cornerback Wayne Lyons transferred to Michigan. Stanford has always done well to reload, even when it lost a major haul. The Cardinal will have to do the same again.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Conrad Ukropina missed all three of his field goal attempts during the spring game and Alex Robinson averaged only 37 yards per punt. It's expected that a pair of incoming true freshmen will make a good run at those jobs. Jake Bailey is a scholarship kicker/punter with a long field goal of 54 as a high school senior; Charlie Beall joins as a preferred walk-on.

OVERVIEW

The Cardinal's four-year run of reaching a major bowl ended in 2014 and for the first time in a while, Stanford isn't viewed in the top tier of Pac-12 teams. The schedule this year is a little lighter (having Arizona, UCLA, Washington, Oregon and Notre Dame at home helps), so Stanford has a chance to bounce back near the top of the league.

TOP NEWCOMER

DE Brennan Scarlett: The first graduate transfer in program history comes across the Bay from Cal, where his promising career was derailed by injuries. His younger brother Cameron, a running back, joins the program this fall, so Brennan will get to be teammates with him while filling a position of need for Stanford.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	8	**Kevin Hogan***	6-4	225	Sr.
RB	22	**Remound Wright***	5-9	204	Sr.
FB	35	Daniel Marx	6-2	247	So.
WR	89	**Devon Cajuste***	6-4	229	Sr.
WR	3	Michael Rector	6-1	185	Sr.
TE	18	**Austin Hooper***	6-4	249	Jr.
LT	78	**Kyle Murphy***	6-7	298	Sr.
LG	51	**Joshua Garnett***	6-5	325	Sr.
C	52	**Graham Shuler***	6-4	287	Sr.
RG	57	**Johnny Caspers***	6-4	287	Sr.
RT	66	Nick Davidson	6-7	288	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	7	Aziz Shittu	6-3	275	Sr.
DT	66	Harrison Phillips	6-4	255	So.
DE	N/A	Brennan Scarlett	6-4	260	Sr.
LB	48	**Kevin Anderson***	6-4	245	Sr.
LB	4	**Blake Martinez***	6-2	247	Sr.
LB	3	Noor Davis	6-4	243	Sr.
LB	34	Peter Kalambayi	6-3	245	Jr.
CB	11	Terrence Alexander	5-10	178	So.
CB	21	**Ronnie Harris***	5-10	173	Sr.
S	5	Kodi Whitfield	6-2	204	Sr.
S	10	**Zach Hoffpauir***	6-0	197	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	34	Conrad Ukropina	6-1	189	Sr.
P	47	Alex Robinson	6-0	207	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Northwestern
Sept. 12	UCF
Sept. 19	at USC
Sept. 25	at Oregon State
Oct. 3	ARIZONA
Oct. 15	UCLA
Oct. 24	WASHINGTON
Oct. 31	at Washington State
Nov. 7	at Colorado
Nov. 14	OREGON
Nov. 21	CALIFORNIA
Nov. 28	NOTRE DAME

2014 RESULTS

W	UC DAVIS	45-0
L	USC	10-13
W	ARMY	35-0
W	at Washington	20-13
L	at Notre Dame	14-17
W	WASHINGTON STATE	34-17
L	at Arizona State	10-26
W	OREGON STATE	38-14
L	at Oregon	16-45
L	UTAH (2OT)	17-20
W	at California	38-17
W	at UCLA	31-10
	Foster Farms Bowl	
W	vs. Maryland	45-21

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	27.2	77
Rushing	158.8	70
Passing	229.8	65
Total	388.6	75
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	16.4	2
Rushing	104.5	7
Passing	177.9	8
Total	282.4	3
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 5	- 0.38	T-95

UTAH | UTES

Pac-12 rank: 7 Record: 9-4 Pac-12 record: 5-4 (5th, South) Stadium: Rice-Eccles Stadium (45,017)

RANKING 32

UTES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Salt Lake City, Utah
COACH: Kyle Whittingham — At Utah and overall: 85-43, 10 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Jim Harding, Aaron Roderick
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: John Pease

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2008, Mountain West
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013, Sun
RETURNING STARTERS: 18; 7 offense, 9 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Travis Wilson, RB Devontae Booker, WR Kenneth Scott, DE Hunter Dimick, LB Jared Norris, LB Gionni Paul, P Tom Hackett, K Andy Phillips

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Booker is being billed as a Heisman Trophy candidate after rushing for 1,512 yards last season. He averaged 130.1 yards against Pac-12 opponents and is once again expected to carry a big load — especially with a relatively inexperienced receiving corps. Hackett and Phillips are special team stars.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Health is a particular concern. Paul, S Tevin Carter, WR Tim Patrick, QB Kendal Thompson and LB Jason Whittingham are all coming back from injuries that sidelined them for stretches in 2014. Another situation to watch is the starting quarterback battle between seniors Wilson and Kendal Thompson.

DEVONTAE BOOKER
Photo by Steve Beyer

OFFENSE

Utah ranked last in the Pac-12 with 388.1 yards per game in 2014, but there is reason for optimism.

Running back Devontae Booker returns for his senior season. He topped the Pac-12 with 1,171 yards in conference play, doing so on 41 more carries than anyone else in the league. Booker is once again expected to be the face of Utah's offense.

Six other starters return for new co-offensive coordinators Jim Harding and Aaron Roderick. The duo, which will continue to coach the offensive line and quarterbacks, respectively, were tabbed to replace Dave Christensen, who left for Texas A&M after one season.

Travis Wilson, who has 34 games of experience, is the frontrunner at quarterback. Fellow senior Kendal Thompson is expected to get a shot at the starting job in fall camp. The Oklahoma transfer made two starts last season for the Utes but suffered a leg injury.

Senior Kenneth Scott (48 catches last season) leads a receiving unit lacking in experience.

DEFENSE

There may be a new mayor with the departure of Nate Orchard to the NFL, but "Sack Lake City" is in good shape with nine returning starters.

Orchard, who was the national sacks leader with 1.42 per game last season, has an heir apparent in defensive end Hunter Dimick. The junior ranked among the country's best with 14.5 tackles for loss and 10 sacks in 2014.

Senior Jason Fanaika will play right end, with a pair of hard-hitting sophomores — Lowell Lotulelei and Filipo Mokofisi — slated to start in the interior.

Three seniors occupy the linebacker spots. Jared Norris leads the trio. He made 116 tackles last year. Gionni Paul and Jason Whittingham are back after healing from injuries.

So, too, is senior strong safety Tevin Carter. Former Wyoming quarterback Jason Thompson, a junior, and sophomore Marcus Williams are competing for the job at free safety. Versatile junior Dominique Hatfield tops the cast at cornerback. Juniors Reggie Porter and Justin Thomas also return to the mix.

Utah's defense led the Pac-12 with 55 sacks last season and ranked second in the conference in total defense.

"It's an experienced team. We were able to hit the ground running in spring ball because of that."

— Kyle Whittingham

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Utes have the top kicker-punter combination in the country in Andy Phillips and Tom Hackett. Both were all-conference honorees in 2014. Hackett was also an All-American and winner of the Ray Guy Award.

Return specialists won't be decided until fall camp. Kaelin Clay, who returned three punts and one kickoff for touchdowns last season, will certainly be missed.

OVERVIEW

Utah is coming off a breakthrough 9-4 season, of sorts, that included victories over Michigan, Stanford, USC and UCLA. The Utes went 5-4 in Pac-12 play, finishing with a winning record for the first time since joining the conference in 2011. It remains to be seen how they'll fare without longtime defensive coordinator Kalani Sitake (Oregon State) and offensive coordinator Dave Christensen (Texas A&M). Seven home games should help.

TOP NEWCOMER

DE Kylie Fitts: After sitting out last season because of transfer rules, the former UCLA lineman cracked the pre-fall two-deep as the backup to Hunter Dimick at left end. Fitts was highly touted out of high school.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	7	**Travis Wilson***	6-7	233	Sr.
RB	23	**Devontae Booker***	5-11	212	Sr.
WR	2	**Kenneth Scott***	6-3	208	Sr.
WR	8	Bubba Poole	6-1	197	Sr.
WR	9	Tim Patrick	6-5	204	Sr.
TE	87	Siale Fakailoatonga	6-4	251	Jr.
LT	68	**J.J. Dielman***	6-5	295	Jr.
LG	54	**Isaac Asiata***	6-4	315	Jr.
C	60	**Siaosi Aiono***	6-2	305	Sr.
RG	74	**Salesi Uhatafe***	6-4	315	So.
RT	52	Sam Tevi	6-5	300	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	49	**Hunter Dimick***	6-3	266	Jr.
DT	45	**Filipo Mokofisi**	6-3	285	So.
NT	93	**Lowell Lotulelei***	6-2	310	So.
DE	51	**Jason Fanaika***	6-3	270	Sr.
LB	53	**Jason Whittingham***	6-2	245	Sr.
LB	41	**Jared Norris***	6-2	234	Sr.
LB	13	**Gionni Paul***	5-10	225	Sr.
CB	29	Reggie Porter	5-11	181	Jr.
CB	15	**Dominique Hatfield***	5-10	175	Jr.
NB	12	**Justin Thomas***	5-8	178	Jr.
SS	9	**Tevin Carter***	6-1	210	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	39	**Andy Phillips***	5-10	205	Jr.
P	33	**Tom Hackett***	5-11	195	Sr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	MICHIGAN
Sept. 11	UTAH STATE
Sept. 19	at Fresno State
Sept. 26	at Oregon
Oct. 10	CALIFORNIA
Oct. 17	ARIZONA STATE
Oct. 24	at USC
Oct. 31	OREGON STATE
Nov. 7	at Washington
Nov. 14	at Arizona
Nov. 21	UCLA
Nov. 28	COLORADO

2014 RESULTS

W	IDAHO STATE	56-14
W	FRESNO STATE	59-27
W	at Michigan	26-10
L	WASHINGTON STATE	27-28
W	at UCLA	30-28
W	at Oregon State (2OT)	29-23
W	USC	24-21
L	at Arizona State (OT)	16-19
L	OREGON	27-51
W	at Stanford (2OT)	20-17
L	ARIZONA	10-42
W	at Colorado	38-34
	Las Vegas Bowl	
W	vs. Colorado State	45-10

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	31.3	49
Rushing	190.4	39
Passing	197.7	93
Total	388.1	76
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.9	T-42
Rushing	146.8	41
Passing	246.6	90
Total	393.5	58
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 5	+ 0.38	T-37

CALIFORNIA | BEARS

Pac-12 rank: 8 Record: 5-7 Pac-12 record: 3-6 (4th, North) Stadium: Memorial (63,186)

RANKING 44

BEARS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Berkeley, Calif.
COACH: Sonny Dykes — At Cal: 6-18, 2 years; overall: 28-33, 5 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Tony Franklin
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Art Kaufman

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2006, co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2011, Holiday
RETURNING STARTERS: 16; 8 offense, 7 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Jared Goff, RB Daniel Lasco, WR/KR Trevor Davis, WR Kenny Lawler, WR Bryce Treggs, LB Michael Barton, DT Mustafa Jalil

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Cal is touting Goff as a Heisman Trophy candidate after he broke 15 schools records last year, including passing yards (3,973) and passing touchdowns (35). The offense can put up points and has the benefit of continuity.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Dykes' teams, going back to his Louisiana Tech days, have been atrocious defensively. The gains last year under Kaufman were minimal, but at least they were there. The Bears can score all they want, but at some point, Cal needs to at least slow down other offenses.

JARED GOFF
Photo by Kirby Lee-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

The Golden Bears' fast-paced attack is led by junior Jared Goff, who is already third on Cal's career passing list with 7,481 yards. He should set the school record within the season's first month, and he provides the Bears their biggest reason for hope.

Goff helped Cal average 495.2 yards and 38.3 points per game last year. The Bears return almost all of that production, although wide receiver Chris Harper left early for the NFL Draft and was not selected.

Cal returns two receivers who caught more than 50 balls — Kenny Lawler (54) and Bryce Treggs (52). The Bears also bring back leading rusher Daniel Lasco, who had 1,115 yards and 12 rushing touchdowns.

Despite the hype around Goff — Cal already markets him as a Heisman Trophy candidate — the Bears hope to focus more on the ground game. Three returning starters on the line is a good start. Right guard Jordan Rigsbee has all started all 36 games since his freshman year in 2012.

DEFENSE

The Bears made minimal gains on defense last year, going from the second-worst unit in the country in 2013 (529.6 yards per game allowed) to the fifth-worst (511.8). It's been a major area of concern for Sonny Dykes-coached teams.

In his final year at Louisiana Tech in 2012, his team had the distinction of ranking first in the nation in offense and last in defense. So this marks three straight years in the bottom five nationally.

Injuries can only explain so much, and the Bears have seen plenty of those on defense. But that has resulted in increased roles for players forced onto the field, a situation that could pay off this season.

Five linebackers return with significant experience, led by leading tackler Michael Barton and Hardy Nickerson Jr., the son of the former NFL All-Pro linebacker. After missing the 2013 season, defensive tackle Mustafa Jalil started all 12 games last year and former starter Kyle Kragen is back after missing last season with an illness.

Luke Rubenzer, who was Cal's backup and change-of-pace quarterback last year, spent most of the spring working out at safety, but it's still undecided if that's where he'll play.

> "We're bigger, stronger and faster and have more depth than we've had at any point since I've been here."
> — Sonny Dykes

SPECIAL TEAMS

The place-kicker battle remains unsettled between junior Noah Beito and sophomore Matt Anderson. Neither has attempted a college kick. Anderson had one kickoff last year; Beito has kicked off once and punted twice. Punter Cole Leininger has a career average of 41.0 yards per attempt.

OVERVIEW

Cal came up a game short of reaching the postseason in 2014 and three of its losses were by a touchdown or less. This could be the Bears' final year with Goff at quarterback because he could make an early jump to the NFL. With that in mind, Dykes' third year is a critical step toward a bowl invitation.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT James Looney: The younger brother of San Francisco 49ers offensive lineman Joe Looney is a transfer from Wake Forest who redshirted last year. He played six games off the bench in 2013 for the Demon Deacons and was a projected starter last year before transferring.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	16	**Jared Goff***	6-4	210	Jr.
RB	2	**Daniel Lasco***	6-0	210	Sr.
WR	9	Trevor Davis	6-2	180	Sr.
WR	1	**Bryce Treggs***	5-11	185	Sr.
WR	4	**Kenny Lawler***	6-3	195	Jr.
TE	89	**Stephen Anderson***	6-3	220	Sr.
LT	64	**Steven Moore***	6-6	305	Jr.
LG	66	**Chris Borrayo***	6-3	305	Jr.
C	74	Matt Cochran	6-3	295	Jr.
RG	73	**Jordan Rigsbee***	6-4	300	Sr.
RT	59	Brian Farley	6-7	280	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	13	**Kyle Kragen***	6-2	245	Sr.
DT	9	James Looney	6-3	285	So.
DT	90	**Mustafa Jalil***	6-3	300	Sr.
DE	75	Puka Lopa	6-2	260	Sr.
LB	30	**Jake Kearney***	6-3	220	Jr.
LB	47	**Hardy Nickerson***	6-0	225	Jr.
LB	8	**Michael Barton***	6-0	230	Jr.
CB	6	Darius White	6-1	180	Sr.
CB	2	Darius Allensworth	5-11	190	So.
S	26	**Griffin Piatt***	6-3	200	Jr.
S	21	**Stefan McClure***	5-11	200	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	19	Noah Beito	6-0	190	Jr.
P	16	**Cole Leininger***	6-1	200	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	GRAMBLING STATE
Sept. 12	SAN DIEGO STATE
Sept. 19	at Texas
Sept. 26	at Washington
Oct. 3	WASHINGTON STATE
Oct. 10	at Utah
Oct. 22	at UCLA
Oct. 31	USC
Nov. 7	at Oregon
Nov. 14	OREGON STATE
Nov. 21	at Stanford
Nov. 28	ARIZONA STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	at Northwestern	31-24
W	SACRAMENTO STATE	55-14
L	at Arizona	45-49
W	COLORADO (2OT)	59-56
W	at Washington State	60-59
L	WASHINGTON	7-31
L	UCLA	34-36
L	vs. Oregon (Santa Clara, CA)	41-59
W	at Oregon State	54-31
L	at USC	30-38
L	STANFORD	17-38
L	BYU	35-42

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	38.3	10
Rushing	149.2	84
Passing	346.0	6
Total	495.2	13
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	39.8	120
Rushing	144.6	38
Passing	367.2	125
Total	511.8	121
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 3	- 0.25	T-85

WASHINGTON | HUSKIES

Pac-12 rank: 9 Record: 8-6 Pac-12 record: 4-5 Pac-12 (3rd, North) Stadium: Husky Stadium (70,138)

RANKING 56

HUSKIES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Seattle
COACH: Chris Petersen — At Washington: 8-6, 1 year; overall: 100-18, 8 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jonathan Smith
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Pete Kwiatkowski

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2000
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2009
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 5 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Dwayne Washington, WR Jaydon Mickens, CB Naijiel Hale, SS Budda Baker, FS Kevin King

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The culture clashes of last season, highlighted by the dismissal of star cornerback Marcus Peters, should be a thing of the past. The coaches should also have a better feel for the talents of their players. A secondary filled with emerging talent should be vastly improved.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: UW enters the fall with nothing set at quarterback, and massive rebuilding on its offensive line and defensive front seven. UW lost a lot of star power on defense last year and likely can't replace that production and leadership.

DWAYNE WASHINGTON
Photo by James Snook-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

It's hard to know what to make of the Huskies until a quarterback emerges.

Last year's starter, Cyler Miles, left the team in March and it remained uncertain at the end of the spring if he would return by the fall (an option coach Chris Petersen hadn't ruled out).

Junior Jeff Lindquist, redshirt freshman K.J. Carta-Samuels and true freshman Jake Browning battled in the spring with no clear victor, though Lindquist — the best runner of the three — appeared to have a slight edge.

The offensive line also has some questions after losing four seniors, and the receivers — while talented — have battled inconsistency. Dwayne Washington led UW with 697 rushing yards last season, but the real key will be if he gets much room to run this year.

DEFENSE

The defense was mystifyingly inconsistent in 2014 despite the presence of four players — led by nose tackle Danny Shelton — who were taken in the top 44 picks of the NFL Draft — three in the first round.

Two other starters are gone from the front seven, leading to some massive rebuilding up front. Consider that of UW's 52 sacks last season, 44 were made by players now departed.

UW has talent up front, with sophomore tackle Elijah Qualls and end Will Dissly playing well in the spring. Washington also can turn to some experienced players to help fill in at linebacker.

The secondary, which was young and the soft spot of the defense a year ago, should be much improved. Strong safety Budda Baker, who started every game last year as a true freshman, is a budding star — he's the leading returning tackler with 80. Free safety Kevin King and cornerbacks Naijiel Hale and Sidney Jones round out what could be one of the better secondaries in the conference.

SPECIAL TEAMS

After years of searching for quality returners, the Huskies can boast having one of the most electric return men in the conference in Dante Pettis, a receiver who had an 87-yard return for a touchdown last season. John Ross, who returned two kickoffs for scores, is out for this season, though, with a leg injury.

UW's kicking spots are also in good shape, with returning punter Korey Durkee and kicker Cameron Van Winkle. The overall play of the special teams last season, though, was a little shaky and an area that figures to become more consistent in Petersen's second year.

> "There's no sense of entitlement. I've still got to work my butt off to stay in that spot."
>
> — WR Tyler Winston, on his big freshman season

OVERVIEW

Petersen didn't have quite the smooth landing at UW as might have been anticipated, losing half as many games — six — as he had in seven seasons at Boise State. Petersen talked throughout the spring of how the team is beginning to take on the desired identity, but, on paper, this looks like a rebuilding year. A realistic hope is for the young Huskies to have a respectable season, and maybe pull an upset or two, to set up a breakthrough in 2016.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Jake Browning: The Folsom (Calif.) High star turned down Alabama, among others, and enrolled in time for spring ball. The results were middling, but the excitement is high for the nation's first quarterback to throw for 60 or more touchdowns in three straight years of high school.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	5	Jeff Lindquist	6-3	244	Jr.
RB	12	**Dwayne Washington***	6-2	221	Jr.
WR	87	Dante Pettis	6-0	183	So.
WR	4	**Jaydon Mickens***	5-11	174	Sr.
WR	16	Marvin Hall	5-10	187	Sr.
TE	82	**Joshua Perkins***	6-4	226	Sr.
LT	52	Jake Eldrenkamp	6-5	298	Jr.
LG	76	**Dexter Charles***	6-5	312	Sr.
C	55	Dane Crane	6-3	287	So.
RG	65	Siosifa Tufunga	6-4	282	So.
RT	79	**Coleman Shelton***	6-8	309	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	5	Joe Mathis	6-2	249	Jr.
NT	11	Elijah Qualls	6-1	304	So.
DT	90	Taniela Tupou	6-2	293	Sr.
DE	98	Will Dissly	6-4	275	So.
LB	41	**Travis Feeney***	6-4	223	Sr.
LB	47	Scott Lawyer	6-2	230	Sr.
LB	42	Cory Littleton	6-3	227	Sr.
CB	31	**Naijiel Hale***	5-10	182	So.
CB	26	**Sidney Jones***	6-0	177	So.
SS	32	**Budda Baker***	5-10	186	So.
FS	20	**Kevin King***	6-3	182	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	48	**Cameron Van Winkle***	5-10	181	Jr.
P	45	**Korey Durkee***	6-4	247	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	at Boise State
Sept. 12	SACRAMENTO STATE
Sept. 19	UTAH STATE
Sept. 26	CALIFORNIA
Oct. 8	at USC
Oct. 17	OREGON
Oct. 24	at Stanford
Oct. 31	ARIZONA
Nov. 7	UTAH
Nov. 14	at Arizona State
Nov. 21	at Oregon State
Nov. 27	WASHINGTON STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	at Hawaii	17-16
W	EASTERN WASHINGTON	59-52
W	ILLINOIS	44-19
W	GEORGIA STATE	45-14
L	STANFORD	13-20
W	at California	31-7
L	at Oregon	20-45
L	ARIZONA STATE	10-24
W	at Colorado	38-23
L	UCLA	30-44
L	at Arizona	26-27
W	OREGON STATE	37-13
W	at Washington State	31-13
	Cactus Bowl	
L	vs. Oklahoma State	22-30

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	30.2	54
Rushing	188.6	40
Passing	200.1	87
Total	388.6	74
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.8	39
Rushing	124.1	22
Passing	286.6	120
Total	410.6	78
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+12	+0.86	T-9

WASHINGTON STATE | COUGARS

Pac-12 rank: 10 Record: 3-9 Pac-12 record: 2-7 (T-5th, North) Stadium: Martin Stadium (32,952)

RANKING 60

COUGARS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Pullman, Wash.
COACH: Mike Leach — At WSU: 12-25, 3 years; overall: 96-98, 13 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Leach
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Alex Grinch

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2002, co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2013, New Mexico
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 7 offense, 6 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Luke Falk, WR Gabe Marks, WR Dom Williams, OT Joe Dahl, DE Destiny Vaeao, LB Kache Palacio, LB Jeremiah Allison

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: An offensive line that returns all five starters should aid the growth curve for whoever wins the quarterback derby between Luke Falk and Peyton Bender. The top four receivers all have 60-catch potential. There's talent and depth at linebacker. The hope is that the "extra athlete" in the nickel package will generate more turnovers and fewer yards per play.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Secondary is still so young and thin that JC imports Shalom Luani and Treshon Broughton will have to play; even then, getting takeaways could continue to be an issue. Kick coverage should be improved, but Cougars are still rolling the dice with kickers and punters.

LUKE FALK
Photo by Dave Sizer

OFFENSE

Luke Falk got a head start in the 2015 quarterback beauty contest to succeed Connor Halliday when the nation's passing leader broke a leg against USC, and a win in his first start didn't hurt. So he's a slight favorite over freshman Peyton Bender to trigger Mike Leach's buckshot offense — and he might even check to a run once in a while.

Leach tinkered with putting his quarterbacks under center on occasion in the spring, though whether it will actually be a part of the package on Saturdays remains to be seen. The Cougs could use a bigger run presence, and durable Gerard Wicks may displace returning starter Jamal Morrow as the back of choice.

But the pass will always be the first option. Vince Mayle's off to the NFL with his 106 receptions, but Gabe Marks returns from a redshirt year and will be the most dynamic player on the field often. Steady, precise River Cracraft is another key component, and Robert Lewis seems poised for a big year.

But the strength of the Cougs could at last be an offensive line that returns five starters, led by left tackle Joe Dahl and massive center Riley Sorenson.

DEFENSE

New coordinator Alex Grinch arrives with a new look — nickel will be the Cougars' base package — but an old mandate. Somehow, WSU must generate more takeaways, especially from a secondary that intercepted only a single pass in 2014.

That unit is still painfully young, with four sophomores likely to start. Corners Charleston White and Marcellus Pippins made great strides in the spring, and getting junior college standouts Shalom Luani and Treshon Broughton to flip commitments after a coaching change at Oregon State was a big bonus.

Maybe the front seven can buy the secondary some time. Destiny Vaeao is a dominant physical force who could make the line better, even with the early departure of Xavier Cooper, and freshman Hercules Mata'afa figures to be important when the Cougars have to go big.

> "Our mindset has to be that our whole purpose on the field is to get that ball back to the offense."
>
> — Defensive coordinator Alex Grinch

Meanwhile, the linebacker group is as good as the Cougars have had in years, with Jeremiah Allison and Kache Palacio offering big-play potential. Former UCLA signee Aaron Porter may add some intrigue in the fall.

SPECIAL TEAMS

This area's struggles saw a rare mid-season assistant firing in 2014, but there are still issues unless freshman Matt Abramo is the answer at punter — and maybe even on place-kicks ahead of inconsistent holdovers Erik Powell and Quentin Breshears.

OVERVIEW

Leach has not been the overnight sensation WSU fans had anticipated, and in his fourth year will be breaking in a young quarterback and still searching for impact from his defense. Not letting early winnable games get away as they did in 2014 will be central to the Cougs' hopes of returning to a bowl game in 2015.

TOP NEWCOMER

SS Shalom Luani: The California JC Defensive Player of the Year and first-team All-American attacks the run with ferocity and is a fearsome hitter, but his coverage skills will get a test as he's being counted on for instant impact.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	4	Luke Falk	6-4	201	So.
RB	23	Gerard Wicks	5-11	219	So.
WR	9	Gabe Marks	6-0	190	Jr.
WR	80	Dom Williams	6-2	199	Sr.
WR	**21**	**River Cracraft***	**6-0**	**198**	**Jr.**
WR	15	Robert Lewis	5-9	167	So.
LT	**56**	**Joe Dahl***	**6-4**	**302**	**Sr.**
LG	**63**	**Gunnar Eklund***	**6-7**	**308**	**Sr.**
C	**58**	**Riley Sorenson***	**6-4**	**320**	**Jr.**
RG	**73**	**Eduardo Middleton***	**6-5**	**315**	**Jr.**
RT	**61**	**Cole Madison***	**6-5**	**303**	**So.**
DEFENSE					
DE	**97**	**Destiny Vaeao***	**6-4**	**304**	**Sr.**
NT	90	Daniel Ekuale	6-3	288	So.
DE	99	Darryl Paulo	6-2	265	Sr.
LB	**40**	**Kache Palacio***	**6-2**	**235**	**Sr.**
LB	**8**	**Jeremiah Allison***	**6-2**	**228**	**Sr.**
LB	47	Peyton Pelluer	6-0	228	So.
CB	**16**	**Charleston White***	**5-10**	**180**	**So.**
CB	27	Marcellus Pippins	5-10	170	So.
NB	**28**	**Darius Lemora***	**5-11**	**192**	**So.**
SS	NA	Shalom Luani	6-1	200	Jr.
FS	31	Isaac Dotson	6-1	214	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	**46**	**Erik Powell***	**6-1**	**183**	**So.**
P	NA	Matt Abramo	6-2	170	Fr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	PORTLAND STATE
Sept. 12	at Rutgers
Sept. 19	WYOMING
Oct. 3	at California
Oct. 10	at Oregon
Oct. 17	OREGON STATE
Oct. 24	at Arizona
Oct. 31	STANFORD
Nov. 7	ARIZONA STATE
Nov. 14	at UCLA
Nov. 21	COLORADO
Nov. 27	at Washington

2014 RESULTS

L	vs. Rutgers (Seattle)	38-41
L	at Nevada	13-24
W	PORTLAND STATE	59-21
L	OREGON	31-38
W	at Utah	28-27
L	CALIFORNIA	59-60
L	at Stanford	17-34
L	ARIZONA	37-59
L	USC	17-44
W	at Oregon State	39-32
L	at Arizona State	31-52
L	WASHINGTON	13-31

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	31.8	45
Rushing	39.8	125
Passing	477.7	1
Total	517.5	7
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	38.6	114
Rushing	145.7	40
Passing	296.6	124
Total	442.3	97
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 17	- 1.42	123

OREGON STATE | BEAVERS

Pac-12 rank: 11 Record: 5-7 Pac-12 record: 2-7 (T-5th, North) Stadium: Reser Stadium (45,674)

RANKING 64

BEAVERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Corvallis, Ore.
COACH: Gary Andersen — At Oregon State: 1st year; overall: 49-38, 7 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Dave Baldwin
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kalani Sitake

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2000, co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2013, Hawaii
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 9 offense, 2 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Storm Woods, WR Jordan Villamin, WR Victor Bolden, DL Kyle Peko, LB Bright Ugwoegbu, CB Larry Scott, S Cyril Noland-Lewis

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Though the Beavers return just two starters on defense, coaches were pleased with that unit coming out of spring ball because of the strength up front, athleticism at linebacker and playmakers in the secondary. Woods and the wide receiving corps will be strong.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The youth at quarterback was apparent throughout the spring, as the Beavers often struggled with timing, accuracy and consistency in the passing game. That's usually no way to be in a Pac-12 where quarterbacks usually reign.

STORM WOODS
Photo by John Pyle/Cal Sport Media

OFFENSE

The Beavers are transitioning from a pro-style system under former coach Mike Riley to the up-tempo spread of new coach Gary Andersen. That unit sputtered throughout much of the spring — particularly in the passing game — before making noticeable improvements during the final week.

That's largely because the quarterback who runs this offense will be a youngster.

What started as a seven-man spring competition at quarterback has been narrowed to true freshman Seth Collins and redshirt freshmen Nick Mitchell and Marcus McMaryion. Collins appeared to have the edge following a dazzling performance in the spring game.

The good news is the rest of the offense boasts plenty of experience.

After holding co-starting duties for most of the past two seasons, running back Storm Woods (6.3 yards per carry average in 2014) moves into the No. 1 job and has aspirations of becoming a 1,000-yard back in this system.

All three starting receivers return, with the speedy Victor Bolden (team-high 72 catches and 798 yards) and the big-bodied Jordan Villamin (35 catches, 578 yards, six touchdowns) both offering playmaking potential.

Additionally, the offensive line group that started the final four games of last season returns and could eventually welcome back star Isaac Seumalo, who missed all of last season and spring practice while recovering from two foot surgeries.

DEFENSE

There will be plenty of new faces in prominent roles, especially with the transition to a 3-4 scheme under bright young coaching mind Kalani Sitake.

The defensive front could be bolstered by senior Kyle Peko, a freak athlete at nose guard who entered summer working to become academically eligible by the fall. The Beavers are also encouraged by the athleticism, range and versatility at linebacker, headlined by junior Rommel Mageo (23 tackles, one fumble recovery in 2014) and redshirt freshman Bright Ugwoegbu.

On the back end, cornerback Larry Scott (43 tackles, 11 pass breakups) rebounded from an inconsistent 2014 by shoring up his technique during a solid spring. Safety Cyril Noland-Lewis (27 tackles, two sacks) emerged as another aggressive playmaker and veteran leader.

Perhaps the biggest feel-good story of spring practice came from walk-on Devin Chappell, who looks primed to step into the nickel back role.

> "We're chasing a lot of people, and every day we've just got to get one step closer to them."
>
> — Gary Andersen, on moving up in the Pac-12

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Beavers return kicker Garrett Owens, who went 11 of 13 on field goal attempts while splitting duties with Trevor Romaine during a bizarre 2014, when both kickers dealt with off-field issues.

All other specialist roles will be filled by newcomers, including junior college transfer Nick Porebski at punter.

OVERVIEW

Andersen, 30-9 in his last three years at Wisconsin and Utah State, is confident he can rebuild a program that evolved into a postseason regular and national spoiler under Riley — but lost 12 of its last 14 Pac-12 games over the past two seasons. Yet with a freshman slated to start at quarterback and a bevy of holes to fill on defense, Oregon State is likely at least a year away from seriously competing in a stacked Pac-12.

TOP NEWCOMER

QB Seth Collins: The early enrollee began the spring as the wild card in a wide-open quarterback battle and finished those workouts as the likely frontrunner. His electrifying athleticism — on display during the spring game, when he flipped over one defender and hurdled another — makes him an ideal fit to run OSU's spread offense.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	4	Seth Collins	6-3	185	Fr.
RB	24	**Storm Woods***	6-0	205	Sr.
WR	6	**Victor Bolden***	5-9	170	Jr.
WR	2	**Hunter Jarmon***	5-11	200	So.
WR	13	**Jordan Villamin***	6-4	235	So.
TE	10	Caleb Smith	6-6	265	Sr.
LT	77	**Sean Harlow***	6-4	300	Jr.
LG	64	**Fred Lauina***	6-4	315	So.
C	50	**Josh Mitchell***	6-3	305	Sr.
RG	62	**Gavin Andrews***	6-6	345	Sr.
RT	74	**Dustin Stanton***	6-5	290	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	48	**Jaswha James***	6-2	265	Sr.
NG	99	Kyle Peko	6-1	305	Sr.
DE	10	Jalen Grimble	6-2	290	Sr.
LB	47	Bright Ugwoegbu	6-1	210	Fr.
LB	46	Rommel Mageo	6-2	230	Jr.
LB	35	Caleb Saulo	6-1	230	Jr.
LB	41	Darrell Songy	6-0	225	So.
CB	15	**Larry Scott***	5-11	190	Sr.
CB	29	Dwayne Williams	5-9	175	Fr.
S	17	Cyril Noland-Lewis	6-1	205	Jr.
S	39	Justin Strong	5-9	195	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	21	**Garrett Owens***	5-9	180	So.
P	N/A	Nick Porebski	5-10	190	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	WEBER STATE
Sept. 12	at Michigan
Sept. 19	SAN JOSE STATE
Sept. 25	STANFORD
Oct. 10	at Arizona
Oct. 17	at Washington State
Oct. 24	COLORADO
Oct. 31	at Utah
Nov. 7	UCLA
Nov. 14	at California
Nov. 21	WASHINGTON
Nov. 27	at Oregon

2014 RESULTS

W	PORTLAND STATE	29-14
W	at Hawaii	38-30
W	SAN DIEGO STATE	28-7
L	at USC	10-35
W	at Colorado	36-31
L	UTAH (2OT)	23-29
L	at Stanford	14-38
L	CALIFORNIA	31-45
L	WASHINGTON STATE	32-39
W	ARIZONA STATE	35-27
L	at Washington	13-37
L	OREGON	19-47

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	25.7	86
Rushing	118.1	110
Passing	275.4	31
Total	393.5	72
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	31.6	96
Rushing	158.2	51
Passing	248.1	91
Total	406.3	74
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 4	+ 0.33	T-40

COLORADO | BUFFALOES

Pac-12 rank: 12 **Record: 2-10** **Pac-12 record: 0-9 (6th, South)** **Stadium: Folsom Field (53,613)**

RANKING 67

BUFFALOES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Boulder, Colo.
COACH: Mike MacIntyre — At Colorado: 6-18, 2 years; overall: 22-39, 5 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brian Lindgren
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jim Leavitt

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2001, Big 12
LAST BOWL: 2007, Independence
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 5 offense, 8 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Sefo Liufau, WR Nelson Spruce, WR Devin Ross, LB Addison Gillam, CB Chidobe Awuzie, CB Ahkello Witherspoon

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: "Sefo to Spruce" will once again be the Buffs' mantra. Add in Shay Fields, Bryce Bobo and Devin Ross, and Colorado has a formidable passing game that could cause problems for defenses.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Stopping the run will be vital to Colorado's success. Luckily for CU, the front line is now flush with returning starters and plenty of experience; if that will be enough remains to be seen.

OFFENSE

Sefo Liufau and Nelson Spruce formed one of the more underrated quarterback-wide receiver tandems in the Pac-12 last season.

Liufau connected with Spruce for 1,198 yards and 12 touchdowns, figures that nearly matched Colorado's next three receivers combined. In his second season as starter, Liufau tallied 28 touchdowns and 3,200 yards to finish ahead of guys such as Mississippi's Bo Wallace, UCLA's Brett Hundley and Oregon State's Sean Mannion for 28th overall in the nation.

Helping Liufau and Spruce stretch the field will be a trio of speedy sophomores in Shay Fields, Bryce Bobo and Devin Ross.

The Buffs need someone to step up in the backfield. Colorado's run game suffered last season as Christian Powell led the team with a mere 448 yards on the ground. Powell is back for his senior year and will compete for snaps with the oft-injured Michael Adkins II, Phillip Lindsay and explosive true freshman Kyle Evans.

Helping the Buffaloes' stampede is a line that returns three starting upperclassmen in Jeromy Irwin, Alex Kelley and Stephane Nembot.

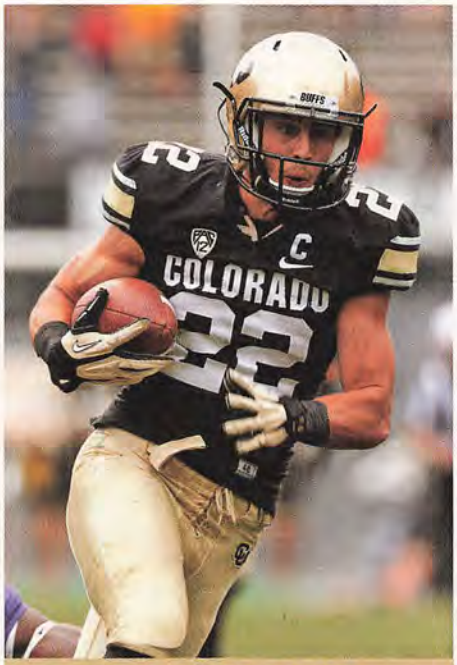
DEFENSE

First-year coordinator Jim Leavitt has to fix a run defense that finished last in the conference. The charismatic Leavitt, the first coach in South Florida history, joined Colorado this spring after serving as San Francisco 49ers linebackers coach the last four years.

The Buffs yielded 204.8 rushing yards a game last season. Colorado does return three starters up front and adds junior college transfer Jordan Carrell to help fill the gaps.

Colorado is relatively deep at linebacker and in the secondary. Addison Gillam (nine tackles for loss, 3.5 sacks) returns to lead the linebackers, along with fellow junior Kenneth Olugbode (83 tackles).

The versatile Chidobe Awuzie anchors the Buffs' last line of defense, switching between cornerback and nickel, depending on what package (3-4 or 4-4) Leavitt settles on. Surrounding the junior are veterans in senior corner Ken Crawley and junior strong safety Tedric Thompson, who had three interceptions last year.



NELSON SPRUCE
Photo by AP Photo/David Zalubowski

"We got a lot more powerful. We're not teenagers anymore."
— Mike MacIntyre

SPECIAL TEAMS

Diego Gonzalez appears to have the slight edge and leg power over Chris Graham to replace place-kicker Will Oliver, who earned honorable mention All-Pac-12 honors last season. Alex Kinney, one of the prizes of the Buffs' 2015 recruiting class, could push Gonzalez and Graham for the role, but he likely will only handle the punting duties.

Phillip Lindsay will again handle kick returns. The sophomore holds the CU freshman record with 1,348 all-purpose yards.

OVERVIEW

Colorado is getting better but is still in rebuilding mode under third-year coach Mike MacIntyre. With a dynamic passing game, a defense with another year under its belt, and a deeper roster, perhaps the Buffs can contend for their first bowl game since 2007. The Pac-12 schedule doesn't allow for many easy wins, however, and another long season could be in store for the Buffs.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Jordan Carrell: A year ago, Carrell watched his former American River College teammate Devontae Booker transfer to Utah and ignite the Utes. Now, it's Carrell's turn to do that for a Pac-12 team. Carrell had 80 tackles, including eight sacks, last season and will provide much-needed depth on run defense.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	13	Sefo Liufau*	6-4	230	Jr.
RB	46	Christian Powell	6-0	230	Sr.
WR	22	Nelson Spruce*	6-1	195	Sr.
WR	5	Shay Fields	5-11	170	So.
WR	4	Bryce Bobo	6-2	190	So.
TE	81	Sean Irwin	6-3	245	Jr.
LT	76	Jeromy Irwin*	6-5	295	Jr.
LG	79	Jonathan Huckins	6-3	305	So.
C	74	Alex Kelley*	6-2	305	Jr.
RG	68	Gerrad Kough	6-4	295	So.
RT	77	Stephane Nembot*	6-7	295	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	98	Jimmie Gilbert*	6-4	230	Jr.
DT	55	Josh Tupou*	6-3	325	Sr.
DT	92	Jordan Carrell	6-3	275	Jr.
DE	95	Derek McCartney*	6-3	240	So.
LB	44	Addison Gillam*	6-3	225	Jr.
LB	31	Kenneth Olugbode*	6-0	210	Jr.
NB	4	Chidobe Awuzie*	6-0	190	Jr.
CB	2	Ken Crawley*	6-1	180	Sr.
CB	23	Ahkello Witherspoon	6-3	185	Jr.
SS	9	Tedric Thompson*	6-0	200	Jr.
FS	6	Evan White	6-2	195	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	10	Diego Gonzalez	5-11	210	Jr.
P	N/A	Alex Kinney	6-0	195	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at Hawaii
Sept. 12	MASSACHUSETTS
Sept. 19	vs. Colorado State (Denver, CO)
Sept. 26	NICHOLLS STATE
Oct. 3	OREGON
Oct. 10	at Arizona State
Oct. 17	ARIZONA
Oct. 24	at Oregon State
Oct. 31	at UCLA
Nov. 7	STANFORD
Nov. 13	USC
Nov. 21	at Washington State
Nov. 28	at Utah

2014 RESULTS

L	vs. Colorado State (Denver)	17-31
W	at Massachusetts	41-38
L	ARIZONA STATE	24-38
W	HAWAII	21-12
L	at California (2OT)	56-59
L	OREGON STATE	31-36
L	at USC	28-56
L	UCLA (2OT)	37-40
L	WASHINGTON	23-38
L	at Arizona	20-38
L	at Oregon	10-44
L	UTAH	34-38

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	28.5	64
Rushing	154.6	75
Passing	284.6	19
Total	439.2	37
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	39.0	T-116
Rushing	204.8	102
Passing	256.2	100
Total	461.0	111
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 10	- 0.83	T-112

PICKING THE SEC

Quarterback Battles Cloud the Division Races

In the past nine years, the SEC has won seven national championships, played for another and had a team selected for the first-ever College Football Playoff.

Alabama or Auburn has been in the national title hunt each year since 2009.

No doubt, the SEC has been dominant. Yet, the league has gone two years without hoisting the championship trophy.

One thing we've learned: You might not even be able to guess who is going to win the SEC — remember Auburn went from 0-8 to SEC champs in 2013 — but whoever that team is will have a chance to capture the national crown.

What's intriguing about this year is that three teams among *Lindy's* top 15 — Alabama, Georgia, LSU — have some degree of quarterback concerns. A fourth highly ranked team, Auburn, has a first-time, full-time starter.

Two other teams trying to bounce back — Florida and South Carolina — didn't identify a starting quarterback in the spring. And yet another team, otherwise ultra-talented Ole Miss, hasn't figured out its quarterback position, either.

Good news for these teams: In the past five years, two SEC teams that went into the fall with an unproven signal-caller ended up with a Heisman Trophy winner — Cam Newton at Auburn and Johnny Manziel at Texas A&M.

It all makes this year's races seem all the more unpredictable, especially in the loaded West.

WEST DIVISION

Alabama won the SEC with first-year starter Blake Sims at quarterback last year. The Tide will try to repeat with another first-year starter, possibly Jake Coker, a Florida State transfer who failed to beat out Sims a year ago. The Tide has a strong supporting cast, led by running back Derrick Henry. The defensive front seven should be nasty.

Auburn is deservedly high on quarterback Jeremy Johnson, who filled in admirably when Nick Marshall was sidelined last season. There are few worries that the offense will again be productive. The concern is defense, where Will Muschamp takes over as coordinator.

LSU could win the West if it gets solid quarterback play from either Anthony Jennings or Brandon Harris. The run game, receivers and defense are high quality.

Mississippi State has the league's best returning quarterback in Dak Prescott, but the Bulldogs lost their top running back, receiver and linebacker. Texas A&M can score points but must bolster its defense to contend. Arkansas is on the rise behind a powerful run game. Ole Miss, while hunting for a quarterback, is stocked with NFL talent.

CONFERENCE PICKS

SEC EAST	Good news	Bad news	Our call
1. Georgia	RB Nick Chubb is phenomenal; standout linebackers anchor the defense.	Starting its third QB in three seasons; has to play Alabama and Auburn from the West.	The supporting cast will overcome average QB play as the East's most talented team does what it should.
2. Tennessee	Josh Dobbs is one of SEC's top three QBs; Vols are strong at RB, WR; defense has more speed.	Vols allowed an SEC-high 43 sacks last year; UT lacks depth on both lines.	Last year's bowl win and 4-1 finish leads us to believe Vols can win eight or nine and contend in East.
3. Missouri	QB Maty Mauk, RB Russell Hansbrough return; Tigers led SEC in sacks, TFLs.	Missouri lost all-purpose back Marcus Murphy and first-round DE Shane Ray.	Gary Pinkel keeps finding ways to win, but it's unlikely the Tigers three-peat in East.
4. Florida	Defense — fifth in the SEC last season — should be strong again; team improved at WR and RB.	Offense was 12th in the SEC, and is retooling with an unproven quarterback.	New coach Jim McElwain will improve the offense, but Gators will struggle to exceed 7-5 mark.
5. South Carolina	WR Pharoh Cooper is a game-changer; the running backs and linebackers are solid.	There is inexperience at quarterback; defense was ranked 13th in the SEC last season.	With a rough road schedule and a dearth of difference-makers, not exactly a big bounce-back.
6. Kentucky	QB Patrick Towles showed promise; Wildcats scored at least 30 points in five games.	Scoring defense (31.2 ppg) was 13th in the SEC, and top defender, DE Bud Dupree, is gone.	Some positive things going on with the program, but another two-win SEC season sounds about right.
7. Vanderbilt	Vandy returns 19 starters; despite 0-8 SEC mark, the 'Dores came within 10 points in three losses.	Was last in the SEC in scoring offense, scoring defense; QB is unproven, and team lacks playmakers.	Derek Mason fired both coordinators, then took over a bad defense. More rebuilding to come.
SEC WEST			
1. Alabama	Nick Saban has amassed another super-talented roster, and he knows what to do with it.	Lost three key players early to NFL; Tide returns just 11 starters and looks for spark at QB.	We find nothing about repeating in the West easy, but Saban has earned trust that it can be done in '15.
2. Auburn	Gus Malzahn has a terrific offensive mind and is smart enough to hire DC Will Muschamp.	Tigers lost QB Nick Marshall, a 1,600-yard running back and a big-play receiver.	The offense will score, Muschamp will improve the defense, and we simply can't wait for the Iron Bowl.
3. LSU	The Tigers have athletes everywhere (as usual); RBs, WRs and defense are strong.	Lost three guys early to NFL Draft, and DC John Chavis left for A&M; passing game still lagging.	The QBs will produce enough that LSU will rebound from 8-5 season to contend for West title.
4. Texas A&M	Sophomore DE Myles Garrett is already a star; DC John Chavis will help boost defense.	In 2014, was last in SEC in total defense (450.8 ypg) and run defense, 13th in pass defense.	Chavis will improve the defense and the offense will produce ... so, at worst, Aggies are a tough out.
5. Arkansas	Hogs have great 1-2 running attack, and the defense vastly improved last season.	Arkansas ranked 11th in passing in the SEC last season; defense lost several top players.	Hogs came on strong to beat LSU, Ole Miss, Texas in bowl; 2015 will see more progress.
6. Ole Miss	Dual-threat QB Dak Prescott had 3,449 passing, 986 rushing, accounted for 41 TDs.	Bulldogs return SEC-low eight starters; lost best RB, best LB; rugged road schedule awaits.	Prescott sparks attack, but defense allowed 80 points in last two games; MSU won't win 10 again.
7. Miss. State	First-round talent abounds at receiver, offensive tackle, defensive tackle.	Rebels searching for a quarterback, appear average at RB, lost SEC interception leader.	The Rebels are a huge wild card. Has talent to contend in West, but QB play could derail that notion.

EAST DIVISION

Georgia will have a new quarterback (Brice Ramsey) and a new offensive coordinator (Brian Schottenheimer), but the Bulldogs have so many proven players. Nick Chubb (1,547 yards) is probably the best running back in a league filled with great running backs. Leonard Floyd and Jordan Jenkins are among the nation's best outside linebackers.

While Georgia benefits from playing host to Missouri, the Bulldogs have the toughest West Division crossovers, facing Alabama and Auburn. Missouri doesn't have it easy, though, getting Mississippi State and Arkansas from the West.

Can Missouri surprise again and win the East? The Tigers return quarterback Maty Mauk and 1,000-yard rusher Russell Hansbrough, but they lose SEC Defensive Player of the Year Shane Ray and multipurpose athlete Marcus Murphy.

Tennessee is on the upswing, led by quarterback Josh Dobbs, who steered the Vols to a 4-1 finish last year. South Carolina (7-6) hopes for a bounce-back season after having its three-year streak of 11 wins snapped. Florida fired Will Muschamp and is rebuilding under Jim McElwain.

— Jimmy Hyams

HONOR ROLL

Most accurate passer	Kyle Allen	Texas A&M
Strongest arm	Dak Prescott	Mississippi State
Best scrambler	Dak Prescott	Mississippi State
Coolest in the clutch	Josh Dobbs	Tennessee
Toughest to bring down	Nick Chubb	Georgia
Best hands	Pharoh Cooper	South Carolina
Most dangerous deep threat	Laquon Treadwell	Ole Miss
Best pass blocker	Laremy Tunsil	Ole Miss
Best run blocker	Cam Robinson	Alabama
Best cover corner	Vernon Hargreaves III	Florida
Best pass rusher	Myles Jarrett	Texas A&M
Special teams demon	Isaiah McKenzie	Georgia

Most Valuable Player

Dak Prescott, QB, Mississippi State

Offensive Player of the Year

Nick Chubb, RB, Georgia

Defensive Player of the Year

Vernon Hargreaves III, CB, Florida

Newcomer of the Year

Alvin Kamara, RB, Tennessee

Lindy's **ALL-SEC TEAM**

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Dak Prescott	Sr.	Mississippi State
RB	Nick Chubb	So.	Georgia
RB	Derrick Henry	Jr.	Alabama
WR	Laquon Treadwell	Jr.	Ole Miss
WR	Pharoh Cooper	Jr.	South Carolina
TE	Evan Engram	Jr.	Ole Miss
C	Evan Boehm	Sr.	Missouri
OL	Laremy Tunsil	Jr.	Ole Miss
OL	Cam Robinson	So.	Alabama
OL	John Theus	Sr.	Georgia
OL	Greg Pyke	Jr.	Georgia
AP	Isaiah McKenzie	So.	Georgia
PK	Austin MacGinnis	So.	Kentucky

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	Carl Lawson	So.	Auburn
DL	Myles Garrett	So.	Texas A&M
DL	Robert Nkemdiche	Jr.	Ole Miss
DL	A'Shawn Robinson	Jr.	Alabama
LB	Reggie Ragland	Sr.	Alabama
LB	Antonio Morrison	Sr.	Florida
LB	Leonard Floyd	Jr.	Georgia
DB	Vernon Hargreaves III	Jr.	Florida
DB	Cam Sutton	Jr.	Tennessee
DB	Jamal Adams	So.	LSU
DB	Quincy Mauger	Jr.	Georgia
P	JK Scott	So.	Alabama

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Josh Dobbs	Jr.	Tennessee
RB	Leonard Fournette	So.	LSU
RB	Alex Collins	Jr.	Arkansas
WR	Duke Williams	Sr.	Auburn
WR	De'Runnya Wilson	Jr.	Mississippi State
TE	Hunter Henry	Jr.	Arkansas
C	Ryan Kelly	Sr.	Alabama
OL	Dan Skipper	Jr.	Arkansas
OL	Connor McGovern	Sr.	Missouri
OL	Shon Coleman	Jr.	Auburn
OL	Jerald Hawkins	Jr.	LSU
AP	Speedy Noil	So.	Texas A&M
PK	Marshall Morgan	Sr.	Georgia

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Derek Barnett	So.	Tennessee
DL	Curt Maggitt	Sr.	Tennessee
DL	Montravius Adams	Jr.	Auburn
DL	Harold Brantley	Jr.	Missouri
LB	Jordan Jenkins	Sr.	Georgia
LB	Kentrell Brothers	Sr.	Missouri
LB	Jalen Reeves-Maybin	Jr.	Tennessee
DB	Jonathan Jones	Sr.	Auburn
DB	Tony Connor	Sr.	Ole Miss
DB	Brian Randolph	Sr.	Tennessee
DB	Cyrus Jones	Sr.	Alabama
P	Drew Kaser	Sr.	Texas A&M

OFFENSE - THIRD TEAM

QB	Jeremy Johnson	Jr.	Auburn
RB	Jalen Hurd	So.	Tennessee
RB	Jonathan Williams	Sr.	Arkansas
WR	Demarcus Robinson	Jr.	Florida
WR	Josh Reynolds	Jr.	Texas A&M
TE	Steven Scheu	Sr.	Vanderbilt
C	Mike Matthews	Sr.	Texas A&M
OL	Denver Kirkland	Jr.	Arkansas
OL	Vadal Alexander	Sr.	LSU
OL	Brandon Shell	Jr.	South Carolina
OL	Jordan Swindle	Sr.	Kentucky
AP	Boom Williams	So.	Kentucky
PK	Andrew Baggett	Sr.	Missouri

DEFENSE - THIRD TEAM

DL	Marquis Haynes	So.	Ole Miss
DL	Johnathan Allen	Jr.	Alabama
DL	Chris Jones	Jr.	Mississippi State
DL	Jonathan Bullard	Jr.	Florida
LB	Kendell Beckwith	Jr.	LSU
LB	Lorenzo Carter	So.	Georgia
LB	Denzel Nkemdiche	Sr.	Ole Miss
DB	TreDavious White	Jr.	LSU
DB	Will Redmond	Sr.	Mississippi State
DB	Jalen Mills	Jr.	LSU
DB	Ian Simon	Sr.	Missouri
P	Jamie Keehn	Sr.	LSU

THE BIG ONES

Sept. 3	
South Carolina vs. North Carolina (Charlotte)	Border-state schools rarely play for SEC-ACC bragging rights.
Sept. 5	
Alabama vs. Wisconsin (Arlington)	Tide has dominated neutral site games vs. Big Ten, ACC, Big 12.
Auburn vs. Louisville (Atlanta)	Auburn's Jeremy Johnson faces a tough Louisville front seven.
Texas A&M vs. Arizona State (Houston)	Aggies will find out if defense has improved under DC John Chavis.
Sept. 12	
LSU at Mississippi State	Very early, this could separate contender from pretender in West.
Oklahoma at Tennessee	Vols seek revenge after getting trounced in Norman last year.
Sept. 19	
Ole Miss at Alabama	Rebels pulled upset over No. 1 Tide last year in Oxford
Auburn at LSU	Auburn mauled Bengals last year; winner makes West statement.
South Carolina at Georgia	Loser has usually finished behind winner in East chase.
Sept. 26	
Texas A&M vs. Arkansas (Arlington)	Aggies play in another NFL venue vs. former SWC rival.
Tennessee at Florida	Rivalry once decided East title; Gators have won 10 in a row.
LSU at Syracuse	Rare venture to Northeast for LSU; Les Miles can't eat this grass.
Oct. 3	
Alabama at Georgia	Battle of favorites to win respective divisions; rematch is possible.
Oct. 10	
Georgia at Tennessee	With Vols on upswing, outcome could determine East winner.
Oct. 17	
Florida at LSU	LSU has won 4 of 5 but doesn't want Florida as permanent East foe.
Missouri at Georgia	Georgia won at Mizzou last year but couldn't hold serve at home in 2013.
Oct. 24	
Tennessee at Alabama	Nick Saban has dominated Vols (8-0) since going to Bama in 2007.
Oct. 31	
Florida vs. Georgia (Jacksonville)	Dawgs blew chance to win East last year when Gators ran at will.
Nov. 7	
LSU at Alabama	Winningest SEC programs over the past decade could decide West.
Nov. 14	
Georgia at Auburn	South's oldest rivalry, could impact each divisional race.
Nov. 21	
Tennessee at Missouri	If Georgia stumbles, this could be for East supremacy.
Nov. 28	
Alabama at Auburn	Iron Bowl winner has played for six straight national titles.
Florida State at Florida	Though Gators have struggled, this is still a bitter ballgame.
Georgia at Georgia Tech	SEC East favorites takes on ACC division contender.
South Carolina at Clemson	Clemson finally ended Gamecocks win streak at five.

A'SHAWN ROBINSON

Photo by RD MOORE

BOWL CONNECTIONS

One or more SEC teams are eligible for the four-team College Football Playoff. Those SEC teams not selected for the semifinals can be picked for the Sugar bowl this season.

SEC #1	Sugar vs. Big 12
SEC #2	Citrus vs. Big Ten
SEC #3	Outback vs. Big Ten
SEC #4-7	Taxslayer.com vs. Big Ten
SEC #4-7	Music City vs. ACC
SEC #4-7	Liberty vs. Big 12
SEC #4-7	Belk vs. ACC
SEC #8-10	Birmingham vs. Big East
SEC #8-10	Independence vs. ACC
SEC #8-10	Texas vs. Big 12

TOP 10 NFL TALENT

1. Laremy Tunsil	LT	Jr.	Ole Miss	Could play LT or RT, but pros like him on blind side.
2. Vernon Hargreaves III	CB	Jr.	Florida	Terrific cover corner; great feet, hips, makeup speed.
3. Robert Nkemdiche	DT	Jr.	Ole Miss	Great athlete for inside player, could be DE in 3-4.
4. Leonard Floyd	OLB	Jr.	Georgia	Has a skill NFL loves — he can rush the passer.
5. Duke Williams	WR	Sr.	Auburn	Rare blend of size, speed; and he's a dude with a 'tude.
6. A'Shawn Robinson	DT	Jr.	Alabama	Outstanding talent, run stopper; plays with effort.
7. Laquon Treadwell	WR	Jr.	Ole Miss	Big-time WR, big target, good hands and speed.
8. Carl Lawson	DE	So.	Auburn	Explosive, disruptive player; missed last year (ACL).
9. Derrick Henry	RB	Jr.	Alabama	Extremely productive; concern: straight line runner.
10. Reggie Ragland	LB	Sr.	Alabama	Good instincts, sure tackler, every down LB.

*Only draft-eligible players included.

By JC Shurburtt 247Sports

SEC RECRUITING

ALABAMA: The Crimson Tide signed the No. 1 class in the nation for the fifth consecutive recruiting cycle. Five-star quarterback Blake Barnett is a great fit for Lane Kiffin's offense. Receiver Calvin Ridley and cornerback Kendall Sheffield are two of the fastest prospects in the country. Alabama signed the country's top running back in Damien Harris. Defensive tackle Daron Payne out of Birmingham is potentially special.

TENNESSEE: The Vols signed the No. 4 class in the nation (No. 2 in the SEC) and enrolled 10 early. JC running back Alvin Kamara, formerly of Alabama, will add an immediate game-breaking effect to the Vols offense. Defensive tackles Kahlil McKenzie and Shy Tuttle have All-American potential as does defensive end Kyle Phillips, who will remind some of current emerging Tennessee star Derek Barnett.

LSU: The Tigers signed one of the top cornerbacks in the country — five-star Kevin Toliver II — and landed seven of the top 10 prospects from the state of Louisiana, including gamebreakers Tyron Johnson, Derrick Dillon and Donte Jackson and three stud running backs — Derrius Guice, Nick Brossette and David Ducre.

GEORGIA: The Bulldogs landed seven defensive prospects at either end or tackle, including the nation's No. 1 overall prospect, defensive tackle Trent Thompson. Georgia also signed eight players that project in the secondary, led by head-hunting safety Rashad Roundtree and four-star cornerback Rico McGraw.

AUBURN: The Tigers landed eight prospects from the Sunshine State, led by five-star defensive end Byron Cowart. The Tigers also got 10 prospects out of the state of Georgia, including speedy Darius Slayton, who flipped from UGA late. Of course, there also is five-star running back Jovon Robinson, the nation's top rated JC runner, who could start in 2015.

TEXAS A&M: The Aggies landed three five-stars — including defensive tackle Daylon Mack, quarterback Kyler Murray and wide receiver Christian Kirk. This class also filled needs nicely in the secondary as JC Justin Evans can certainly help and in-state four-stars Justin Dunning and Larry Pryor have excellent ability and upside.

OLE MISS: The Rebels got immediate help at quarterback in JC transfer and former Clemson signal caller Chad Kelly and at receiver with DaMarkus Lodge and Van Jefferson. Defensive tackle D.J. Jones is good enough to get in the rotation right away. Also, the No. 1 overall prospect in the 2015 class from the Magnolia State, offensive guard Javon Patterson, further strengthens the numbers on the Rebels offensive line.

MISSISSIPPI STATE: Safety Jamal Peters and linebacker Leo Lewis were two in-state coups who were among the best at their positions nationally. Plus, there is junior college help already on campus in the form of offensive tackle Martinas Rankin and defensive end Johnathan Calvin. In-state defensive lineman Fletcher Adams is a stud. Overall, this is another good class with a mix of no-brainers and talented junior college players.

SOUTH CAROLINA: The Gamecocks got help along the defensive line. JC defensive end Marquavius Lewis is on campus and already starting. Transfer Dexter Wideman is pushing for a starting job, too. Dante Sawyer, Devante Covington and Ulric Jones arrive from JC this summer, along with high school talents Shameik Blacksher and Quandeski Whitlow. Quarterback Lorenzo Nunez could compete for a spot in the two-deep and wide receivers Jalen Christian and Dexter Neal could sneak into the rotation.

FLORIDA: Landing five-star offensive tackle Martez Ivey and five-star defensive end CeCe Jefferson, who both are in-state products and longtime Gator leans, was a "best case" type of scenario for new head coach Jim McElwain and his staff, which came in behind the eight ball like most first-year staffs do. Running backs Jordan Scarlett and Jordan Cronkrite were good late lands as well and keep an eye on receiver Antonio Callaway.

ARKANSAS: The Razorbacks landed nine of the top 10 prospects from the Natural State, including a pair of tight ends in Will Gragg and C.J. O'Grady and the quarterback of the future in Ty Storey. Arkansas offensive line coach Sam Pittman won an out-of-state recruiting battle for a talented offensive lineman, four-star tackle Jalen Merrick. Defensive lineman Hjalte Froholdt comes to Fayetteville by way of Germany via IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla.

MISSOURI: The Tigers landed five-star DL Terry Beckner Jr. from East St. Louis, Ill. Mizzou also has its quarterback of the future in U.S. Army All-American Drew Lock. Junior college offensive tackle Malik Cuellar is better than his ranking and could play right away. Also, the Tigers get Chase Abbington back from the JC ranks — the only question there is what position will he play?

KENTUCKY: Linebacker Eli Brown is an excellent athlete who should see early playing time. Tight end C.J. Conrad is one of the Wildcats' Ohio signees (they signed five in 2015). Immediate defensive line help arrives in the form of Pearl River (Miss.) College's Courtney Miggins and watch out for Kengera Daniel. Two prospects from D.C. — wide receiver Jabari Greenwood and offensive tackle Levon Livingston — were very resourceful lands.

VANDERBILT: The Commodores signed only 18 prospects in 2015. Defensive lineman Nehemiah Mitchell enrolled as a mid-year JC transfer and should help. Linebacker Josh Smith, a U.S. Army All-American from nearby Oakland High in Murfreesboro, Tenn., was the No. 3 inside linebacker prospect nationally in the 2015 cycle. Donovan Sheffield at cornerback is another local star Vanderbilt kept at home. Kyle Shurmur, a 6-4 pocket passer, could be the quarterback of the future.

NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR: Jovon Robinson arrives at Auburn (for the second time) as the top running back from the junior college ranks. There already is talk of him starting and given the Tigers' offensive system, you can imagine the type of numbers a back of his caliber will be able to put up. The only question is — with Auburn's talent at running back (Roc Thomas, Peyton Barber, et. all), will he get enough carries?

THE SLEEPERS: Auburn cornerback signee Jeremiah Dinson has a chance to be very good. Watch out for Arkansas defensive end signee T.J. Smith and Georgia cornerback signee DeAndre Baker as well. All three prospects (Dinson and Baker from south Florida, Smith from North Carolina) are from regions that are known for producing plenty of talent at those respective positions. Additionally, keep an eye on 6-7 wide receiver Josh Smith of Missouri. The Tigers plucked him late in the process out of Dublin, Ga., — hometown of one Demaryius Thomas.

LIKELY TO BE BEST NFL PLAYER: It's hard to argue with the upside of Florida's Martez Ivey at offensive tackle. If he develops as he should, he will be a very high pick in the NFL Draft when his time comes. Georgia defensive tackle Trent Thompson was the top prospect in the class for a reason — he has elite quickness for his size, as does Tennessee's Kahlil McKenzie.

NO. 1 SIGNING COUPS: Auburn and new defensive coordinator Will Muschamp went into the state of Florida and landed five-star defensive end Byron Cowart out of Armwood High in Seffner, Fla., which has traditionally been a pipeline to Gainesville, Fla. Alabama swiped a five-star cornerback for the second straight cycle as Kendall Sheffield follows Tony Brown to Tuscaloosa. Ole Miss beat Texas, Texas A&M and Baylor on elite receiver DaMarkus Lodge, who could make an instant impact in Oxford.

BIGGEST MISSES: It was tough for Texas A&M to lose the top prospect in the state — linebacker Malik Jefferson — to rival Texas. While Florida had a coaching change and landed two of the top three prospects in the state, losing Cowart was a bitter pill to swallow. Kentucky was in great shape in-state for five-star running back Damien Harris before a trip to Tuscaloosa changed things. He rolled with the Tide.

BEST RECRUITING STAFF: It's hard to argue against Alabama. The Crimson Tide has signed the No. 1 class in the country for five consecutive recruiting cycles. That's unprecedented during the era of modern recruiting coverage. Alabama did not get everybody it wanted, but got most, made great evaluations along the way and has another class full of difference-makers heading to T-town.

TOP 20 INCOMING RECRUITS

RK	NAME	HT/WT	POS	HOMETOWN/SCHOOL	COLLEGE
1.	Trent Thompson	6-2/313	DT	Albany, Ga./Westover	Georgia
2.	Martez Ivey	6-5/275	OT	Apopka, Fla./Apopka	Florida
3.	Byron Cowart	6-4/250	DE	Seffner, Fla./Armwood	Auburn
4.	Kahlil McKenzie	6-3/354	DT	Concord, Calif./Clayton Valley	Tennessee
5.	CeCe Jefferson	6-2/275	DE	Glen St. Mary, Fla./Baker Co.	Florida
6.	Kevin Toliver II	6-2/185	CB	Jacksonville, Fla./Trinity Christian	LSU
7.	Calvin Ridley	6-0/170	WR	Pompano Beach, Fla./Monarch	Alabama
8.	Terry Beckner Jr.	6-4/293	DT	East St. Louis, Ill./East St. Louis	Missouri
9.	Daylon Mack	6-1/330	DT	Gladewater, Texas/Gladewater	Texas A&M
10.	Kendall Sheffield	6-0/181	CB	Missouri City, Texas/Ft. Bend Marshall	Alabama
11.	Blake Barnett	6-4/200	QB	Corona, Calif./Santiago	Alabama
12.	Christian Kirk	5-10/191	WR	Scottsdale, Ariz./Saguaro	Texas A&M
13.	Tyron Johnson	6-1/191	WR	New Orleans, La./Warren Easton	LSU
14.	Terry Godwin	6-0/168	ATH	Hogansville, Ga./Callaway	Georgia
15.	Daron Payne	6-2/340	DT	Birmingham, Ala./Shades Valley	Alabama
16.	Minkah Fitzpatrick	6-1/198	CB	Jersey City, N.J./St. Peters Prep	Alabama
17.	Damien Harris	5-11/205	RB	Berea, Ky./Madison Southern	Alabama
18.	Kyler Murray	5-10/180	QB	Allen, Texas/Allen	Texas A&M
19.	Kyle Phillips	6-3/250	DE	Nashville, Tenn./Hillsboro	Tennessee
20.	Maea Teuhema	6-4/340	OG	Keller, Texas/Keller	LSU

ALABAMA | CRIMSON TIDE

SEC rank: 1 Record: 12-2 SEC record: 7-1 SEC (1st, West) Stadium: Bryant-Denny Stadium (101,821)

RANKING 3

CRIMSON TIDE at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Tuscaloosa, Ala.
COACH: Nick Saban — At Alabama: 91-17, 8 years; overall: 177-59-1, 19 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Lane Kiffin
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kirby Smart

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2003
RETURNING STARTERS: 11; 2 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Jake Coker, RB Derrick Henry, WR Robert Foster, TE O.J. Howard, NT A'Shawn Robinson, DE Jonathan Allen, DE Jarran Reed, LB Reggie Ragland

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The defensive line essentially returns everyone, and, paired with some very fast pass-rushers, it could be the Crimson Tide's strongest unit. What Alabama might lack in experience, especially on offense, it more than makes up for with talent. If Alabama can avoid injuries on the offensive line, Henry should have a huge year.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Coker didn't establish himself as the clear starter during the spring, although none of the young, talented alternatives appeared ready to take over. There's not a lot of depth at wide receiver or tight end, and Alabama took some hits at running back. If the secondary doesn't step up, the defense could be vulnerable to the deep ball yet again.

OFFENSE

The offense annihilated the Alabama record book in Lane Kiffin's first year as coordinator, but the Crimson Tide has to almost completely retool with nine new starters and nearly all new playmakers.

The most pressing question mark is at quarterback. Senior Jake Coker has enviable arm strength that will stretch defenses, but at the end of the spring he was still working on his timing and overall command of the offense. Near the end of the spring, coach Nick Saban said he was still looking for a quarterback to step up and take the position.

Behind Coker is a group of extremely young, talented quarterbacks, with redshirt freshman David Cornwell having made the most recent strides. The others are junior Alec Morris, sophomore Cooper Bateman and prize early enrollee Blake Barnett.

In any case, wide receivers Robert Foster, ArDarius Stewart and Chris Black are poised to be primary targets, along with tight end O.J. Howard.

With Derrick Henry and Kenyan Drake in the backfield, the running game has a potent combination behind a big line featuring tackles Cam Robinson and Dominick Jackson, and third-year starter Ryan Kelly at center.

DEFENSE

Alabama's defense could be lights-out good, but only if the secondary continues to make strides in the wake of the steady stream of players who have left early for the NFL. Landon Collins was the latest to bolt before his eligibility expired, but there's a lot of young developing talent at cornerback and safety.

The defensive back to watch might be sophomore cornerback Tony Brown, a former five-star recruit. The speedster should get a chance to start because of Eddie Jackson's move to safety. Right behind him is Marlon Humphrey, leading the next wave of potentially great Alabama defensive backs.

REGGIE RAGLAND
Photo by RD Moore

"We used to be a team that nobody wanted to play, relentless competitors, tough, hard-nosed. We've got to get some of that back."

— Nick Saban

The front seven has the size, speed and depth to make offenses miserable. Let's put it this way: Linebacker Reggie Ragland, the leader of the unit, kept getting frustrated in the spring because the starting three on the line — A'Shawn Robinson, Jarran Reed and Jonathan Allen — kept beating him to the ball carrier.

While the hard-hitting Reuben Foster is expected to split snaps with Shaun Dion Hamilton at the other interior linebacker spot, veteran Denzel Devall leads a fast group of outside linebackers who will also be used as pass-rushers and backfield pests.

SPECIAL TEAMS

JK Scott is hailed as the best punter in the nation (48.0-yard average), while kicker Adam Griffith (12 of 19 field goal attempts last season) hopes to put his back problems behind him. Overall, Alabama's special teams have the potential to be outstanding.

OVERVIEW

After winning back-to-back national titles, the Crimson Tide has been close, but unable to return to the title game the past two years. It has the talent. Alabama should again be in the running, but with a tough schedule and an unproven offense, the first step — winning the very competitive SEC West — is mighty challenging.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Calvin Ridley: The consensus five-star prospect was tabbed the best wide receiver in the 2015 recruiting class by 247Sports. Ridley hoped to enroll early at Alabama, but didn't. He still has a chance to make a quick impact due to depth concerns.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	14	Jake Coker	6-5	232	Sr.
RB	2	Derrick Henry	6-3	242	Jr.
WR	8	Robert Foster	6-2	194	So.
WR	13	ArDarius Stewart	6-1	204	So.
WR	1	Chris Black	6-0	192	Jr.
TE	88	O.J. Howard	6-6	242	Jr.
LT	**74**	**Cameron Robinson***	**6-6**	**326**	**So.**
LG	71	Ross Pierschbacher	6-4	298	Fr.
C	**70**	**Ryan Kelly***	**6-5**	**297**	**Sr.**
RG	75	Bradley Bozeman	6-5	320	So.
RT	76	Dominick Jackson	6-6	315	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	**90**	**Jarran Reed***	**6-4**	**313**	**Sr.**
NT	**86**	**A'Shawn Robinson***	**6-4**	**312**	**Jr.**
DE	**93**	**Jonathan Allen***	**6-3**	**272**	**Jr.**
LB	**30**	**Denzel Devall***	**6-2**	**252**	**Sr.**
LB	10	Reuben Foster	6-1	240	Jr.
LB	**19**	**Reggie Ragland***	**6-2**	**252**	**Sr.**
LB	22	Ryan Anderson	6-2	258	Jr.
CB	2	Tony Brown	6-0	195	So.
CB	**5**	**Cyrus Jones***	**5-10**	**196**	**Sr.**
S	24	Geno Smith	6-0	196	Sr.
S	**4**	**Eddie Jackson***	**6-0**	**194**	**Jr.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**99**	**Adam Griffith***	**5-10**	**192**	**Jr.**
P	**15**	**JK Scott***	**6-5**	**195**	**So.**

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	vs. Wisconsin (Dallas, TX)
Sept. 12	MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Sept. 19	OLE MISS
Sept. 26	ULM
Oct. 3	at Georgia
Oct. 10	ARKANSAS
Oct. 17	at Texas A&M
Oct. 24	TENNESSEE
Nov. 7	LSU
Nov. 14	at Mississippi State
Nov. 21	CHARLESTON SOUTHERN
Nov. 28	at Auburn

2014 RESULTS

W	vs. West Virginia (Atlanta, Ga.)	33-23
W	FAU	41-0
W	SOUTHERN MISS	52-12
W	FLORIDA	42-21
L	at Ole Miss	17-23
W	at Arkansas	14-13
W	TEXAS A&M	59-0
W	at Tennessee	34-20
W	at LSU (OT)	20-13
W	MISSISSIPPI STATE	25-20
W	WESTERN CAROLINA	48-14
W	AUBURN	55-44
	SEC Championship Game	
W	vs. Missouri	42-13
	Sugar Bowl - Semifinal	
L	vs. Ohio State	35-42

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	36.9	15
Rushing	206.6	35
Passing	277.9	28
Total	484.5	17
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	18.4	6
Rushing	102.4	4
Passing	226.0	58
Total	328.4	12
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 2	- 0.14	71

AUBURN | TIGERS

SEC rank: 2 Record: 8-5 SEC: 4-4 (T-4th, West) Stadium: Jordan-Hare Stadium (87,451)

RANKING 8

TIGERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Auburn, Ala.
COACH: Gus Malzahn — At Auburn: 20-7, 2 years; overall: 29-10, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Rhett Lashlee
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Will Muschamp

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2013
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 15: 5 offense; 8 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Jeremy Johnson, RB Roc Thomas, RB Jovon Robinson, WR Duke Williams, WR Ricardo Louis, LT Shon Coleman, DE Carl Lawson, DT Montravius Adams, CB Jonathan Jones, S Tray Matthews

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: With Johnson at QB, a talented three-man tailback rotation and a veteran receiving corps, Auburn should score in bunches again. The offensive line is talented and experienced. With the return of Lawson and the addition of Muschamp and Matthews, Auburn's defense should be much improved. The kicking game is solid.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Tigers once again play an extremely tough schedule. Inexperienced depth at the offensive tackle spots, quarterback, defensive tackle and in the secondary could be an issue playing in a physical conference. Youth at H-back. There's not much size at cornerback in a league full of big wideouts.

DUKE WILLIAMS
Photo by RD Moore

OFFENSE

After backing up Nick Marshall for the past two seasons, the time has arrived for Jeremy Johnson to take center stage as Auburn's starting quarterback. Johnson has all the tools to be one of the SEC's best signal-callers.

Junior Jovon Robinson and sophomores Roc Thomas and Peyton Barber will vie for carries in Auburn's dynamic running game this fall. Robinson, the former junior college Player of the Year, will combine with Barber to give the Tigers' two backs who can push the pile and wear down defenses. Thomas is a home-run threat who possesses a dazzling spin move.

D'haquille Williams will enter the season as the team's top wideout, but fellow senior Ricardo Louis really came on at the end of last season and could be in line for a monster year.

The coaching staff likes what they have in young H-Backs Kamryn Pettway and Chandler Cox, athletic players who will be used primarily as blockers.

Up front, the Tigers should benefit tremendously from the return of former Freshman All-American Alex Kozan, who missed last season with a back injury. Kozan should combine with starting tackles Shon Coleman and Avery Young, and Ole Miss transfer Austin Golson (center), to give the Tigers a solid line.

DEFENSE

The addition of Will Muschamp, along with the return of standout pass rusher Carl Lawson, almost instantaneously improves an Auburn defense that allowed 26.7 points and nearly 400 yards a game.

Look for the Tigers to use multiple fronts and morph from 3-4 to the 4-3 looks while mixing in nickel and dime packages.

Last year defense took an uppercut to the chin before the season even began when it lost Lawson for the year (knee). Without Lawson, the Tigers totaled just 21 sacks, which tied for 95th nationally.

Veterans DaVonte Lambert (end) and Montravius Adams (tackle) are in line to join Lawson and redshirt freshman Dontavius Russell (tackle), as the starters up front. Lawson will man the "Buck" position, which is a hybrid outside linebacker/defensive end role.

Cassanova McKinzy and Kris Frost are the team's top players at the linebacker. Hard-hitting Tre' Williams is another 'backer to keep an eye on.

Jonathan Jones, one of the SEC's top corners, anchors a secondary that has a lot of frontline talent, but lacks significant depth. He'll team with Joshua Holsey to give the Tigers a solid cornerback duo.

Rudy Ford and Tray Matthews could give Auburn its best safety combo in years.

> **"I'm ready for it. It's been like that even when I wasn't the starting quarterback."**
> **— Jeremy Johnson on being the starting QB**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Daniel Carlson handled Auburn's kicking, punting and kickoff duties last season and became one of the team's most reliable players. The return units aren't settled, but Ricardo Louis, Roc Thomas, Marcus Davis and incoming true freshman Kerryon Johnson are all candidates.

OVERVIEW

Running the football will always be a staple under Gus Malzahn, but having a strong, accurate passer like Johnson should allow the offense to be more unpredictable. If Auburn's defense improves quickly, the Tigers will contend for the SEC West title.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Jovon Robinson: Robinson has a nice blend of size, speed and natural running ability and lined up as the team's starting tailback to open the A-Day Game. He's picked up the offense quickly and could be in line for a big season.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	9	Jeremy Johnson	6-5	230	Jr.
RB	29	Jovon Robinson	6-0	230	Jr.
HB	36	Kamryn Pettway	6-0	242	Fr.
WR	**1**	**Duke Williams***	**6-2**	**224**	**Sr.**
WR	5	Ricardo Louis	6-2	215	Sr.
WR	80	Marcus Davis	5-9	180	Jr.
LT	**72**	**Shon Coleman***	**6-6**	**313**	**Jr.**
LG	63	Alex Kozan	6-4	300	Jr.
C	73	Austin Golson	6-5	304	So.
RG	71	Braden Smith	6-6	286	So.
RT	**56**	**Avery Young***	**6-6**	**305**	**Jr.**
DEFENSE					
DE	**6**	**DaVonte Lambert***	**6-2**	**282**	**Sr.**
DT	**1**	**Montravius Adams***	**6-4**	**296**	**Jr.**
DT	95	Dontavius Russell	6-3	295	Fr.
BUCK	55	Carl Lawson	6-2	257	Jr.
LB	**17**	**Kris Frost***	**6-2**	**240**	**Sr.**
LB	**8**	**Cassanova McKinzy***	**6-3**	**253**	**Sr.**
LB	16	JaVier Mitchell	6-2	215	Jr.
CB	**3**	**Jonathan Jones***	**5-10**	**181**	**Sr.**
CB	**15**	**Joshua Holsey***	**5-11**	**198**	**Sr.**
S	**23**	**Rudy Ford***	**6-0**	**203**	**Jr.**
S	39	Tray Matthews	6-1	213	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	**38**	**Daniel Carlson***	**6-4**	**213**	**So.**
P	**38**	**Daniel Carlson***	**6-4**	**213**	**So.**

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	vs. Louisville (Atlanta, GA)
Sept. 12	JACKSONVILLE STATE
Sept. 19	at LSU
Sept. 26	MISSISSIPPI STATE
Oct. 3	SAN JOSE STATE
Oct. 15	at Kentucky
Oct. 24	at Arkansas
Oct. 31	OLE MISS
Nov. 7	at Texas A&M
Nov. 14	GEORGIA
Nov. 21	IDAHO
Nov. 28	ALABAMA

2014 RESULTS

W	ARKANSAS	45-21
W	SAN JOSE STATE	59-13
W	at Kansas State	20-14
W	LOUISIANA TECH	45-17
W	LSU	41-7
L	at Mississippi State	23-38
W	SOUTH CAROLINA	42-35
W	at Ole Miss	35-31
L	TEXAS A&M	38-41
L	at Georgia	7-34
W	SAMFORD	31-7
L	at Alabama	44-55
	Outback Bowl	
L	vs. Wisconsin (OT)	31-34

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	35.5	25
Rushing	255.5	13
Passing	229.5	66
Total	485.0	16
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	26.7	62
Rushing	168.8	67
Passing	230.1	68
Total	398.8	64
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 7	+ 0.54	T-27

GEORGIA | BULLDOGS

SEC rank: 3 | Record: 10-3 | SEC: 6-2 (2nd, East) | Stadium: Sanford Stadium (92,746)

RANKING 10

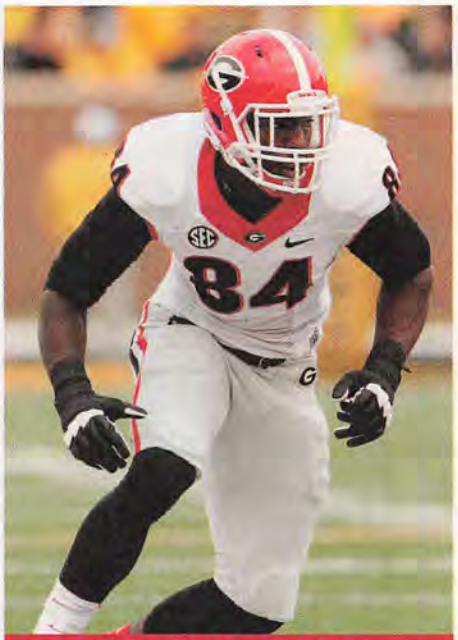
BULLDOGS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Athens, Ga.
COACH: Mark Richt — At Georgia and overall: 135-48, 14 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brian Schottenheimer
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jeremy Pruitt

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2005
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 1996
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 7 offense, 6 defense, punter, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Nick Chubb, RB Sony Michel, WR Malcolm Mitchell, OT John Theus, OLB Jordan Jenkins, OLB Leonard Floyd, OLB/DE Lorenzo Carter, SS Quincy Mauger

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The running game is powerful, with an experienced and talented offensive line along with Chubb and Michel. Mitchell, WR Justin Scott-Wesley and TE Jeb Blazevich are reliable receivers. The linebackers are fast and play with high motors; Jenkins, Floyd and Carter are as good as you will find. The defensive line lacks star quality but is deep.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The run defense must improve dramatically, and the Dawgs have to find some inside linebackers among talented but inexperienced players. The secondary remains a question mark. It's impossible to know how a new quarterback will handle the offense until the games begin.



LEONARD FLOYD
Photo by Steve Beyer

OFFENSE

Georgia really has only two unsettled positions on offense. They just happen to be two critical positions.

"Yeah, the QB and center — right up the gut," coach Mark Richt said.

Brice Ramsey, Faton Bauta and Jacob Park will extend their competition at quarterback into preseason practice. Richt indicated that the separating factors may not be skills but how well they master the new offense under coordinator Brian Schottenheimer.

At center, Isaiah Wynn and Hunter Long are trying to replace three-year starter David Andrews.

The rest of the offense is set. Nick Chubb was sensational, rushing for 1,547 yards and 14 touchdowns as a true freshman after Todd Gurley was suspended and then injured. Chubb finished with eight consecutive 100-yard performances, including two over 200. Sony Michel is another exciting back who will play a role.

The line is experienced and talented, led by left tackle John Theus and right guard Greg Pyke.

Malcolm Mitchell and Justin Scott-Wesley lead the receiving corps. Tight end Jeb Blazevich made some big catches as a freshman and should be an improved blocker after adding strength.

DEFENSE

The strength of the defense is the pass rush from the outside linebackers. Leonard Floyd had six sacks, Jordan Jenkins five and Lorenzo Carter 4.5 last season.

With Jenkins and Floyd having seniority, Carter technically isn't a starter. But he might end up being the best player on the defense, so there will be plenty of packages featuring all three. The flexibility will make it even tougher for opponents to know who to block.

At inside linebacker, there's little experience — the departed Amarlo Herrera and Ramik Wilson hardly came off the field the last two seasons — but plenty of talent. Junior Reggie Carter was poised to start two years ago before suffering a knee injury.

There's no shortage of linemen, but how they will sort out remains to be seen. There's the steady veteran and the phenom — Sterling Bailey and Trent Thompson, respectively. Beyond that, there will probably be a rotation.

> "They all have the ability to throw the ball the way we want it to be thrown."
> — Mark Richt, on his QB situation

Strong safety Quincy Mauger has become a leader and free safety Dominick Sanders has big-play ability. Cornerbacks Aaron Davis and Malkom Parrish are returning starters but they will be challenged.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Marshall Morgan was a little inconsistent last year (16 of 21 field goal attempts) but has made a number of big kicks. Punter Collin Barber has a strong leg but has been inconsistent, averaging 39.3 yards last season.

The Dawgs have an explosive tandem of returners — Isaiah McKenzie (aka The Human Joystick) and Reggie Davis. McKenzie had three returns for touchdown — two punts, one kickoff.

OVERVIEW

Georgia's overall talent level is as good as it has been in several years, but a new quarterback and new coordinator inject uncertainty into the projections. Another 10-win season is quite possible, as is the East title. Whether the Dawgs can work their way into the playoffs will depend on the quarterback play.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Trent Thompson: Many recruiting services, including 247Sports, rated Thompson as the top high school signee in the country. At 313 pounds, Thompson has the size necessary for a 3-4 nose, and he's also quick and strong. He could provide much-needed help in stopping the run, one of Georgia's weaknesses at times last year.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	12	Brice Ramsey	6-3	213	So.
RB	27	**Nick Chubb***	5-10	220	So.
RB	48	**Quayvon Hicks***	6-2	251	Sr.
WR	26	Malcolm Mitchell	6-1	195	Sr.
WR	86	Justin Scott-Wesley	5-11	201	Sr.
TE	83	**Jeb Blazevich***	6-5	248	So.
LT	71	**John Theus***	6-6	203	Sr.
LG	54	**Brandon Kublanow***	6-3	282	Jr.
C	77	Isaiah Wynn	6-2	278	So.
RG	73	**Greg Pyke***	6-6	313	Jr.
RT	75	**Kolton Houston***	6-5	285	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	58	Sterling Bailey	6-3	282	Sr.
DT	97	John Atkins	6-4	300	So.
DE	89	James DeLoach	6-3	284	Sr.
LB	59	**Jordan Jenkins***	6-3	253	Sr.
LB	45	Reggie Carter	6-1	228	Jr.
LB	42	Tim Kimbrough	6-0	226	Jr.
LB	84	**Leonard Floyd***	6-4	231	Jr.
CB	35	**Aaron Davis***	6-1	190	So.
CB	14	**Malkom Parrish***	5-10	188	So.
SS	20	**Quincy Mauger***	6-0	200	Jr.
FS	24	**Dominick Sanders***	6-0	189	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	13	**Marshall Morgan***	6-3	194	Sr.
P	32	**Collin Barber***	6-2	208	Sr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	ULM
Sept. 12	at Vanderbilt
Sept. 19	SOUTH CAROLINA
Sept. 26	SOUTHERN
Oct. 3	ALABAMA
Oct. 10	at Tennessee
Oct. 17	MISSOURI
Oct. 31	vs. Florida (Jacksonville, FL)
Nov. 7	KENTUCKY
Nov. 14	at Auburn
Nov. 21	GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Nov. 28	at Georgia Tech

2014 RESULTS

W	CLEMSON	45-21
L	at South Carolina	35-38
W	TROY	66-0
W	TENNESSEE	35-32
W	VANDERBILT	44-17
W	at Missouri	34-0
W	vs. Arkansas (Little Rock)	45-32
L	vs. Florida (Jacksonville)	20-38
W	at Kentucky	63-31
W	AUBURN	34-7
W	CHARLESTON SOUTHERN	55-9
L	GEORGIA TECH (OT)	24-30
	Belk Bowl	
W	vs. Louisville	37-14

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	41.3	8
Rushing	257.8	11
Passing	199.9	T-88
Total	457.8	28
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	20.7	16
Rushing	166.8	61
Passing	170.4	5
Total	337.2	17
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 16	+ 1.23	4

LSU | TIGERS

SEC rank: 4 Record: 8-5 SEC: 4-4 (T-4th, West) Stadium: Tiger Stadium (102,321)

RANKING 13

TIGERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Baton Rouge, La.
COACH: Les Miles — At LSU: 103-29, 10 years; overall: 131-50, 14 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Cam Cameron
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kevin Steele

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2011
LAST BOWL: 1999
RETURNING STARTERS: 16; 7 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Leonard Fournette, WR Travin Dural, LT Jerald Hawkins, RT Vadal Alexander, LB Kendell Beckwith, CB Tre'Davious White, SS Jamal Adams, FS Jalen Mills

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: As always, LSU will be able to run the ball. With Fournette, the Tigers will simply be able to do so to a heightened degree. Dural provides a real threat in the passing game. Beckwith is a formidable linebacker, and the well-stocked secondary — with veterans like Mills and White, and younger players such as Adams and Kevin Toliver — promises to provide vice-like coverage.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: There's no escaping the fact the passing game must improve. If not, LSU could be in for another 8-5 record that matched the worst in Miles' tenure. The defensive line, under the auspices of a new coach and coordinator, has been reworked and must improve its pass rush.

JALEN MILLS
Photo by Troy Taormina-USA TODAY Sports

"Waiting for that guy to emerge is an issue."
— Les Miles, on the QB situation

OFFENSE

After losing five games last season, including three of its last four, LSU is out to revitalize a passing attack that ranked 114th nationally, averaging 162.9 yards per game.

Quarterbacks Anthony Jennings and Brandon Harris remained locked in a battle for the starting spot this spring. Jennings started all but one game last year, but he completed just 49 percent of his passes (111 of 227). Harris misfired in his one woeful start against Auburn.

There are no worries about a running game that features sophomore Leonard Fournette, who rushed for a school freshman record 1,034 yards last season, getting better and stronger through the season. He capped his campaign by scoring three touchdowns, including one on a 100-yard kick return, in a Music City Bowl loss to Notre Dame.

LSU has a pair of capable receivers in junior Travin Dural and sophomore Malachi Dupre. They have the potential to complement Fournette and keep the Tigers from becoming too one-dimensional.

DEFENSE

Two new coaches in coordinator Kevin Steele and line coach Ed Orgeron have been entrusted with seven returning starters.

Chief among those are junior linebacker Kendell Beckwith and senior free safety Jalen Mills. The secondary is stocked, with sophomore cornerback Tre'Davious White, another returning starter, promising sophomore strong safety Jamal Adams and highly touted freshman cornerback Kevin Toliver.

The hard-hitting Beckwith returns as LSU's top tackler with 77 total stops. Experienced senior Lamar Louis will join Beckwith in the linebacking corps, along with senior Deion Jones.

There will be two new starting ends sophomore Maquedius Bain and junior Tashawn Bower. The defense needs a better pass rush, and that figures to start with the ends. That's one reason Bain was moved from tackle.

Just as the competition has been fierce at end, so it has been at tackle. Junior Christian LaCouture and senior Quentin Thomas seemingly have emerged from a crowded field that will continue to compete for playing time.

SPECIAL TEAMS

As with the offense, talk here must begin with Fournette, who ran back 24 kickoffs for 625 yards, averaging 26.0 yards per return. White was equally as impressive in returning 25 punts for 273 yards, a 10.9-yard average that included a 67-yard touchdown return against Kentucky.

Junior place-kicker Colby Delahoussaye made 11 of 15 field goal attempts, including a 50-yarder with three seconds left to beat Florida. Australian-born senior punter Jamie Keehn is back after averaging 44.9 yards on 71 attempts. Keehn was a coaches' All-SEC second-team selection.

OVERVIEW

LSU has plenty of speed, strength and athleticism to regain its place among the nation's elite. That won't happen, though, as long as the Tigers remain too one-dimensional offensively. Fournette, alone, as proven in the bowl loss to Notre Dame, is not enough. The quarterbacks must be more productive than a year ago, particularly since the defense doesn't appear as rock solid.

TOP NEWCOMER

CB Kevin Toliver: A five-star recruit from vaunted Trinity Christian in Jacksonville, Fla., Toliver has superior technique and footwork to go along with his 4.5-second speed in the 40-yard dash. The early enrollee is in the right place at the right time as the secondary has openings to fill.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	10	**Anthony Jennings***	6-2	216	Jr.
RB	7	**Leonard Fournette***	6-1	230	So.
FB	47	John David Moore	6-3	229	So.
WR	83	**Travin Dural***	6-2	192	Jr.
WR	15	Malachi Dupre	6-3	187	So.
TE	85	**Dillon Gordon***	6-4	295	Sr.
LT	65	**Jerald Hawkins***	6-6	309	Jr.
LG	63	K.J. Malone	6-4	289	So.
C	77	**Ethan Pocic***	6-7	301	Jr.
RG	78	Garrette Brumfield	6-4	309	Fr.
RT	74	**Vadal Alexander***	6-6	320	Sr.

DEFENSE

DE	46	Tashawn Bower	6-5	237	Jr.
DT	91	**Christian LaCouture***	6-5	300	Jr.
DT	57	**Davon Godchaux***	6-4	298	So.
DE	90	Maquedius Bain	6-4	299	So.
LB	23	**Lamar Lewis***	5-11	229	Sr.
LB	52	**Kendell Beckwith***	6-2	245	Jr.
LB	45	Deion Jones	6-1	220	Sr.
CB	16	**Tre'Davious White***	5-11	191	Jr.
CB	2	Kevin Toliver	6-2	192	Fr.
SS	33	**Jamal Adams***	6-0	206	So.
FS	28	**Jalen Mills***	6-0	194	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	42	**Colby Delahoussaye***	5-10	176	Jr.
P	38	**Jamie Keehn***	6-4	220	Sr.

***Returning starters in bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	McNEESE STATE
Sept. 12	at Mississippi State
Sept. 19	AUBURN
Sept. 26	at Syracuse
Oct. 3	EASTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 10	at South Carolina
Oct. 17	FLORIDA
Oct. 24	WESTERN KENTUCKY
Nov. 7	at Alabama
Nov. 14	ARKANSAS
Nov. 21	at Ole Miss
Nov. 28	TEXAS A&M

2014 RESULTS

W	vs. Wisconsin (Houston)	28-24
W	SAM HOUSTON STATE	56-0
W	ULM	31-0
L	MISSISSIPPI STATE	29-34
W	NEW MEXICO STATE	63-7
L	at Auburn	7-41
W	at Florida	30-27
W	KENTUCKY	41-3
W	OLE MISS	10-7
L	ALABAMA (OT)	13-20
L	at Arkansas	0-17
W	at Texas A&M	23-17
	Music City Bowl	
L	vs. Notre Dame	28-31

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	27.6	T-73
Rushing	224.5	23
Passing	162.9	114
Total	387.5	77
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	17.5	5
Rushing	152.7	46
Passing	164.2	3
Total	316.8	9
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 3	+ 0.23	T-48

TENNESSEE | VOLUNTEERS

SEC rank: 5 Record: 7-6 SEC record: 3-5 (T-4th, East) Stadium: Neyland Stadium (102,455)

RANKING 17

VOLUNTEERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Knoxville, Tenn.
COACH: Butch Jones — At Tennessee: 12-13, 2 years; overall: 62-40, 8 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike DeBord
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: John Jancek

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1998
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 18; 9 offense, 8 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Josh Dobbs, RB Jalen Hurd, WR Marquez North, DE Derek Barnett, DE Curt Maggitt, LB Jalen Reeves-Maybin, CB Cam Sutton

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Dobbs should be one of the SEC's top QBs; the WR corps is deep and talented; the Vols have a solid 1-2 punch at RB. UT's defense can get after the QB. The secondary, led by Sutton, helped UT nab as many interceptions (16) as touchdowns allowed (16) and held opposing quarterbacks to a 53.3 percent completion rate.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Tennessee's offensive line yielded 43 sacks last year and the unit is unproven at both tackle spots. That's the only area that could derail a talented attack. On defense, the Vols could be vulnerable at tackle, although two five-stars were signed. UT also will have trouble replacing tackling machine A.J. Johnson at middle 'backer.

JALEN HURD
Photo by Randy Sartin-USA TODAY Sports

"We could have two very dynamic running backs."

— Butch Jones

OFFENSE

The Vols should have one of the SEC's top five quarterbacks, a gifted 1-2 punch at running back and a talented array of receivers.

Josh Dobbs went 4-1 as the starting quarterback, saving UT's season after Justin Worley's injury. With Dobbs, UT averaged 36.7 points and ran for 208.5 yards per game, compared to 96.4 without him.

Dobbs should have a strong supporting cast. Jalen Hurd rushed for 899 yards as a true freshman despite battling injuries. Speedy Alvin Kamara, a former Alabama signee, was a junior college All-American last season. Kamara turned heads with his ability to turn the corner in spring scrimmages.

The receiving corps is deep, led by Marquez North (30 catches), Pig Howard (54), Von Pearson (38), Josh Malone (23) and Josh Smith (10). North and Smith are coming off injuries that derailed last season. Tight end Ethan Wolf (23) also is an inviting target.

The offensive line — which returns five starters — is still a concern. It yielded an SEC-high 43 sacks. But with the elusive Dobbs at quarterback, the sack numbers dropped dramatically.

DEFENSE

Tennessee's defense has made a dramatic about-face under coordinator John Jancek, who ditched the 3-4 two years ago for the 4-3 alignment.

The main improvement has been the pass rush. Curt Maggitt, a hybrid end/outside linebacker, led the way with 11 sacks last season. Derek Barnett recorded 10 as a true freshman, giving the Vols a potent pass-rush punch.

Maggitt and Barnett are among eight returning defensive starters. UT lost No. 2 all-time leading tackler A.J. Johnson at middle linebacker, tackle Jordan Williams and nickel back Justin Coleman.

The main concern is replacing Johnson, a two-time All-SEC selection. Junior Kenny Bynum and redshirt freshman Dillon Bates worked at the Mike in the spring. Jakob Johnson, injured in the spring, is another candidate.

Jalen Reeves-Maybin, who recorded 101 tackles, is an All-SEC candidate at outside linebacker and the unquestioned leader of the defense.

Junior Cam Sutton is an All-SEC caliber shutdown corner. But because UT often plays five defensive backs, Sutton got a look at the nickel spot in the spring, so he could possibly be matched against an opponent's best wideout.

SPECIAL TEAMS

As a true freshman, Aaron Medley was second in the SEC in made field goals (20 of 26) and was one of five kickers in the league to score at least 100 points (102). He hit 19 of 20 inside 40 yards. Sutton averaged 11.3 yards on punt returns and Evan Berry averaged 29.5 yards on kick returns. The lone void is finding a punter to replace Matt Darr (42.2 yards per punt).

OVERVIEW

The Vols will have an explosive offense if Dobbs stays healthy. The defense should take another step forward in Jancek's third year as coordinator. While depth is an issue at some positions, UT has the look of an eight- or nine-win team that could seriously contend for the East Division if it all breaks right.

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Alvin Kamara: He was an All-American at Hutchinson (Kan.) Community College, where he rushed for 1,211 yards (134.6 per game) and 18 touchdowns. The former Alabama signee showed outstanding speed and cutting ability during the spring at UT.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	11	Josh Dobbs	6-3	212	Jr.
RB	1	**Jalen Hurd***	6-3	230	So.
WR	8	**Marquez North***	6-4	224	Jr.
WR	9	**Von Pearson***	6-3	187	Sr.
WR	2	**Pig Howard***	5-8	187	Sr.
TE	82	**Ethan Wolf***	6-5	240	So.
LT	77	**Kyler Kerbyson***	6-4	317	Sr.
LG	75	**Marcus Jackson***	6-2	308	Sr.
C	57	**Mack Crowder***	6-2	290	Sr.
RG	73	**Jashon Robertson***	6-3	310	So.
RT	63	Brett Kendrick	6-6	308	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	9	**Derek Barnett***	6-3	268	So.
DT	58	Owen Williams	6-2	295	Sr.
DT	95	**Danny O'Brien***	6-2	282	Jr.
DE	56	**Curt Maggitt***	6-3	246	Sr.
LB	42	Chris Weatherd	6-4	217	Sr.
LB	17	Dillon Bates	6-3	225	Fr.
LB	21	**Jalen Reeves-Maybin***	6-1	225	Jr.
CB	23	**Cameron Sutton***	6-1	189	Jr.
CB	12	Emmanuel Moseley	5-11	175	So.
SS	37	**Brian Randolph***	6-0	208	Sr.
FS	33	**LaDarrell McNeil***	6-1	206	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	25	**Aaron Medley***	6-2	189	So.
P	93	Trevor Daniel	6-2	250	So.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Bowling Green (Nashville, TN)
Sept. 12	OKLAHOMA
Sept. 19	WESTERN CAROLINA
Sept. 26	at Florida
Oct. 3	ARKANSAS
Oct. 10	GEORGIA
Oct. 24	at Alabama
Oct. 31	at Kentucky
Nov. 7	SOUTH CAROLINA
Nov. 14	NORTH TEXAS
Nov. 21	at Missouri
Nov. 28	VANDERBILT

2014 RESULTS

W	UTAH STATE	38-7
W	ARKANSAS STATE	34-19
L	at Oklahoma	10-34
L	at Georgia	32-35
L	FLORIDA	9-10
W	CHATTANOOGA	45-10
L	at Ole Miss	3-34
L	ALABAMA	20-34
W	at South Carolina (OT)	45-42
W	KENTUCKY	50-16
L	MISSOURI	21-29
W	at Vanderbilt	24-17
	Tax Slayer Bowl	
W	vs. Iowa	45-28

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	28.9	62
Rushing	146.4	89
Passing	224.2	70
Total	370.5	90
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	24.2	35
Rushing	168.4	T-65
Passing	196.2	22
Total	364.6	36
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 2	+ 0.15	T-53

TEXAS A&M | AGGIES

SEC rank: 6 | Record: 8-5 | SEC record: 3-5 (6th, West) | Stadium: Kyle Field (102,512)

RANKING 23

AGGIES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: College Station, Texas
COACH: Kevin Sumlin — At Texas A&M: 28-11, 3 years; overall: 63-28, 7 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jake Spavital
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: John Chavis

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1998, Big 12
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2008
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 6 offense, 6 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Kyle Allen, WR Josh Reynolds, WR Speedy Noil, C Mike Matthews, DE Myles Garrett, DE Daeshon Hall, CB De'Vante Harris, S Armani Watts

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Allen had a solid freshman campaign and he has one of the best receiving corps in the country. Matthews is back for his third year at center. Garrett anchors the defensive line, which has a combination of depth, athleticism and experience missing in recent years. The secondary should be much better as they adapt to a more-aggressive style under Chavis.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The offensive line was in flux during the spring due to injury and personnel losses, and that needs sorting out in camp. The run game is different, and it will involve Allen running the zone read. The linebacker corps was ravaged by injury in the spring. Place-kicking could be troublesome.

OFFENSE

Head coach Kevin Sumlin brought in offensive line coach/run game coordinator Dave Christensen to install a more physical approach up front.

Christensen's attempt to improve the offensive line was hampered in the spring by the absence of center Mike Matthews due to injury. Junior college transfer Avery Gennesy and returning right tackle Germain Ifedi battled for the left tackle spot; Gennesy appears to have won it for now.

Running backs James White, Brandon Williams and Tra Carson expect to split carries. Carson and White are the thunder; Williams is the lightning.

The receiving corps is one of the best in the nation. The Aggies return All-SEC junior Josh Reynolds (13 touchdowns) and long distance threat Speedy Noil. Early enrollee Christian Kirk will contribute in the slot after a great first spring. Ricky Seals-Jones remains a big target at the Y, and freshman Jordan Davis' size and receiving abilities make him the favorite at H-back.

Sophomore quarterback Kyle Allen worked on learning to run the zone read in the spring, becoming more of a leader. The big thing for Allen is to keep getting better, because there is a potential fall duel with incoming five-star freshman Kyler Murray.

DEFENSE

Former LSU defensive coordinator John Chavis replaced the read-and-react scheme of Mark Snyder with an attacking, in-your-face brand of football.

The unit is led by sophomore Myles Garrett (11.5 sacks), who might well be the country's premier rush end. Chavis moved 265-pound veteran end Julien Obioha inside, but Obioha could be moved back outside depending on the development of five-star freshman Daylon Mack in the middle.

Senior De'Vante Harris had an excellent spring at corner, and junior college transfer Justin Evans and returning free safety Armani Watts have sufficient size and range to be factors in the run game.

MYLES GARRETT
Photo by AP Photo/Aaron M. Sprecher

"Our defensive ends are really happy."
— Kevin Sumlin, on a more aggressive defensive philosophy

The linebacker corps missed veterans A.J. Hilliard, Josh Walker, Otaro Alaka and Shaan Washington in the spring. Their ability to stay healthy could be the key to whether or not the Aggies have a great defense ... or merely an improved one.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Drew Kaser has a big leg, averaging more than 44 yards per attempt in each of the past two seasons. Noil is an explosive return man who is great at making the first tackler miss. Taylor Bertolet is a capable kickoff specialist who is next up at place-kicker, but if he can't get the job done, the Aggies are going to have to turn to freshman Daniel LaCamera.

OVERVIEW

The defense should be much better with Chavis' attacking style, fueled by Garrett's ability to get the quarterback. In addition, Allen and the receiving corps may get a big boost from changes in the run game, giving the Aggies a play-action passing game. And the schedule is SEC-friendly, with only three games outside of the state and SEC West foes Alabama and Auburn at home.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Daylon Mack: The true freshman is already bigger and more explosive than any defensive tackle on the Aggies' roster. He is big enough to handle nose tackle, but quick enough to be a three-technique, if needed.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	10	Kyle Allen	6-3	205	So.
RB	21	Tra Carson	6-0	235	Sr.
WR	3	Speedy Noil	5-11	185	So.
WR	**11**	**Josh Reynolds***	**6-4**	**190**	**Jr.**
WR	**9**	**Ricky Seals-Jones***	**6-5**	**235**	**So.**
TE	89	Jordan Davis	6-4	255	Fr.
LT	65	Avery Gennesy	6-5	305	Jr.
LG	72	Jermaine Eluemunor	6-4	315	Jr.
C	**56**	**Mike Matthews***	**6-2**	**290**	**Sr.**
RG	**79**	**Joseph Cheek***	**6-7**	**310**	**Sr.**
RT	**74**	**Germain Ifedi***	**6-5**	**325**	**Jr.**

DEFENSE

DE	10	Daeshon Hall	6-6	260	Jr.
DT	**95**	**Julien Obioha***	**6-4**	**265**	**Sr.**
DT	**83**	**Alonzo Williams***	**6-4**	**296**	**Sr.**
DE	**15**	**Myles Garrett***	**6-5**	**255**	**So.**
LB	33	Shaan Washington	6-3	235	Jr.
LB	11	Josh Walker	6-1	233	So.
LB	46	A.J. Hilliard	6-2	230	Jr.
CB	28	Victor Davis	6-0	191	So.
CB	**1**	**De'Vante Harris***	**5-11**	**175**	**Sr.**
SS	14	Justin Evans	6-1	195	So.
FS	**23**	**Armani Watts***	**5-11**	**190**	**So.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	24	Taylor Bertolet	5-9	185	Sr.
P	**38**	**Drew Kaser***	**6-3**	**210**	**Sr.**

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	vs. Arizona State (Houston, TX)
Sept. 12	BALL STATE
Sept. 19	NEVADA
Sept. 26	vs. Arkansas (Arlington, TX)
Oct. 3	MISSISSIPPI STATE
Oct. 17	ALABAMA
Oct. 24	at Ole Miss
Oct. 31	SOUTH CAROLINA
Nov. 7	AUBURN
Nov. 14	WESTERN CAROLINA
Nov. 21	at Vanderbilt
Nov. 28	at LSU

2014 RESULTS

W	at South Carolina	52-28
W	LAMAR	73-3
W	RICE	38-10
W	at SMU	58-6
W	vs. Arkansas (Arlington) (OT)	35-28
L	at Mississippi State	31-48
L	OLE MISS	20-35
L	at Alabama	0-59
W	ULM	21-16
W	at Auburn	41-38
L	MISSOURI	27-34
L	LSU	17-23
	Liberty Bowl	
W	vs. West Virginia	45-37

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	35.2	26
Rushing	149.9	82
Passing	305.5	12
Total	455.4	30
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	28.1	T-75
Rushing	216.0	109
Passing	234.8	80
Total	450.8	102
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 7	- 0.54	T-105

MISSOURI | TIGERS

SEC rank: 7 Record: 11-3 SEC record: 7-1 (1st, East) Stadium: Memorial Stadium/Faurot Field (71,168)

RANKING 25

TIGERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Columbia, Mo.
COACH: Gary Pinkel — At Missouri: 113-66, 14 years; overall: 186-103-3, 24 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Josh Henson
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Barry Odom

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1969, Big 8 co-champions
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2012
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 6 offense, 6 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Maty Mauk, RB Russell Hansbrough, C Evan Boehm, DT Harold Brantley, DE Charles Harris, LB Kentrell Brothers, LB Michael Scherer, CB Kenya Dennis

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Missouri has one of the most experienced quarterbacks in the league, working behind a veteran line. That's usually a winning combination. The defensive line reloads with the emergence of edge rushers Harris and Marcus Loud; Brantley is an All-SEC worthy tackle.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Tigers don't return a wide receiver who has caught more than five passes in a season. There's not much depth behind Hansbrough at tailback. The passing game can't afford another midseason lull like Mauk suffered through last season. An injury or two along the defensive line would test the depth.

MATY MAUK
Photo by Steve Beyer

"We've got to win the SEC. That's motivation for us."

— OL Connor McGovern

OFFENSE

Junior quarterback Maty Mauk has started more games (18) than all but two SEC quarterbacks and knows he must improve on last year's completion percentage (53.4) while throwing to new starters at all three receiver positions.

After shedding his body fat percentage nearly in half to 11 percent, Mauk was more nimble in and out of the pocket this spring and worked on stepping up to deliver passes downfield.

No returning wide receiver caught more than five passes last year, which means Mauk will work with an untested cast of wideouts in J'Mon Moore, Wesley Leftwich, Nate Brown and another six or seven freshmen.

Russell Hansbrough isn't the most durable tailback, but he's quietly coming off a 1,084-yard season. The Tigers need depth at the position, and junior college transfer Chase Abbington, a slasher who can catch the ball, could be the ideal complement.

They'll run behind a line that returns five seniors with starting experience, including center Evan Boehm and Connor McGovern, who can play guard or tackle.

DEFENSE

New coordinator Barry Odom knows better than to fix something that isn't broken.

The Tigers lost several key pieces to last year's defense along with coordinator Dave Steckel. But Odom — although he used a 3-4 defense at Memphis the last three years — hasn't overhauled the 4-3-based system Steckel built into one of the SEC's best.

Missouri must replace the most productive tandem of ends in team history in Markus Golden and All-American Shane Ray, who combined for 24.5 sacks after replacing All-SEC standouts Kony Ealy and Michael Sam. But sophomores Charles Harris and Marcus Loud are up to the challenge.

They'll flank the team's most-accomplished lineman in tackle Harold Brantley, a matchup nightmare for slower guards and centers. Coach Gary Pinkel has compared Brantley to former All-SEC tackle and 2013 NFL Rookie of the Year Sheldon Richardson.

Missouri features the top two returning tacklers in the SEC in linebackers Kentrell Brothers and Michael Scherer, plus veteran cornerbacks Aarion Penton and Kenya Dennis.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The most difficult player for Missouri to replace might not be Ray, but all-purpose dynamo Marcus Murphy, last year's SEC leader in all-purpose yards and a constant threat to return punts and kickoffs for touchdowns. Safeties Ian Simon and Anthony Sherrils, and receivers Raymond Wingo and J'Mon Moore, could all get looks in the return game in camp.

Senior Andrew Baggett is back to handle all the kicking duties. He should finish his career as the program's career leader for points and field goals.

OVERVIEW

The Tigers have won consecutive SEC East titles but are hungry for more after losing the league championship game the last two years. Things could get shaky if Mauk doesn't have trusty receivers in the passing game, but Hansbrough's return, a seasoned offensive line and another strong defense could offset a middling passing game and repave the path to Atlanta.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Terry Beckner Jr.: Widely rated a five-star prospect, the East St. Louis, Ill., native was the crown jewel of Mizzou's 2015 recruiting class, picking MU over Auburn, Florida State and Ohio State. The 6-4, 300-pounder is expected to contribute immediately at the tackle rotation.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	7	**Maty Mauk***	6-0	200	Jr.
RB	32	Russell Hansbrough	5-9	195	Sr.
WR	6	J'Mon Moore	6-3	190	So.
WR	2	Nate Brown	6-3	205	So.
WR	18	Wesley Leftwich	6-1	205	Sr.
TE	80	**Sean Culkin***	6-6	245	Jr.
LT	60	**Connor McGovern***	6-4	300	Sr.
LG	62	**Taylor Chappell***	6-5	305	Sr.
C	77	**Evan Boehm***	6-3	320	Sr.
RG	73	**Mitch Hall***	6-5	310	Sr.
RT	55	Nate Crawford	6-5	290	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	91	Charles Harris	6-3	255	So.
DT	90	**Harold Brantley***	6-3	280	Jr.
DT	95	Rickey Hatley	6-4	285	Jr.
DE	35	Marcus Loud	6-4	260	So.
LB	10	**Kentrell Brothers***	6-1	235	Sr.
LB	30	**Michael Scherer***	6-3	235	Jr.
LB	25	Donavin Newsom	6-2	230	Jr.
CB	11	**Aarion Penton***	5-10	190	Jr.
CB	7	**Kenya Dennis***	5-11	200	Sr.
SS	22	Anthony Sherrils	6-0	190	So.
FS	21	**Ian Simon***	6-0	195	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	99	**Andrew Baggett***	6-1	215	Sr.
P	N/A	Corey Fatony	5-11	185	Fr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	SE MISSOURI STATE
Sept. 12	at Arkansas State
Sept. 19	CONNECTICUT
Sept. 26	at Kentucky
Oct. 3	SOUTH CAROLINA
Oct. 10	FLORIDA
Oct. 17	at Georgia
Oct. 24	at Vanderbilt
Nov. 5	MISSISSIPPI STATE
Nov. 14	vs. BYU (Kansas City, MO)
Nov. 21	TENNESSEE
Nov. 28	at Arkansas

2014 RESULTS

W	SOUTH DAKOTA STATE	38-18
W	at Toledo	49-24
W	CENTRAL FLORIDA	38-10
L	INDIANA	27-31
W	at South Carolina	21-20
L	GEORGIA	0-34
W	at Florida	42-13
W	VANDERBILT	24-14
W	KENTUCKY	20-10
W	at Texas A&M	34-27
W	at Tennessee	29-21
W	ARKANSAS	21-14
	SEC Championship Game	
L	vs. Alabama	13-42
	Citrus Bowl	
W	vs. Minnesota	33-17

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	27.8	70
Rushing	177.9	53
Passing	189.1	99
Total	367.0	95
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	21.1	19
Rushing	133.7	27
Passing	212.7	39
Total	346.4	23
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 9	+ 0.64	T-20

ARKANSAS | RAZORBACKS

SEC rank: 8 Record: 7-6 SEC record: 2-6 (7th, West) Stadium: Reynolds Razorback Stadium (72,000)

RANKING 27

RAZORBACKS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Fayetteville, Ark.
COACH: Bret Bielema — At Arkansas: 10-15, 2 years; overall: 78-39, 9 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Dan Enos
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Robb Smith

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1989, Southwest
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 8 offense 6 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Brandon Allen, RB Jonathan Williams, RB Alex Collins, TE Hunter Henry, OG Sebastian Tretola, OT Denver Kirkland, LB Brooks Ellis

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The offense is going to pound, led by a huge line returning nearly intact, plus Henry, a two-time All-SEC second-team tight end. Allen always has good hand-off options with Williams and Collins. Veteran defensive linemen abound. Ellis appears poised to pick up where graduated SEC leading tackler Martrell Spaight left off in 2014.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Arkansas' defense played with much more confidence last year, but many players who inspired that confidence have moved on to NFL training camps and aren't snap-your-fingers replaceable. There is no blazing deep threat at receiver, unless JC transfer Dominique Reed comes through when he reports, or track sprinter/receiver Eric Hawkins' hands catch up to his feet.

ALEX COLLINS
Photo by Ryan A. Miller Icon Sportswire via AP Images

"He is one of those guys that you look at and say, 'I wish we had 105 like him.'"
— Offensive coordinator Dan Enos on RB Jonathan Williams

OFFENSE

With two 1,000-yard running backs, a fifth-year quarterback and a two-time All-SEC second-team tight end operating behind an NFL-sized offensive line, there are many reasons to be excited about the Razorbacks' offense.

And there's a new coordinator, too — Dan Enos, the former Central Michigan head coach.

Senior quarterback Brandon Allen, who was named the MVP of Arkansas' 31-7 bowl romp over Texas, threw 20 touchdown passes versus five interceptions last fall and continued his improvement in the spring. Third-year sophomore Austin Allen returns as his brother's backup.

Enos' infusion of screen passes should enhance the breakaway versatility of running backs Jonathan Williams and Alex Collins. They are already explosively comfortable running inside or outside behind mastodon Hogs Mitch Smothers, Sebastian Tretola, Frank Ragnow, Denver Kirkland and Dan Skipper. All weigh well more than 300 pounds.

Kirkland is the best pass protector Bret Bielema said he has ever coached.

Expect Allen and Enos to target junior tight ends Hunter Henry (37 catches for 513 yards last season) and Jeremy Sprinkle. Leading returning receiver Keon Hatcher (43 catches, 558 yards and six touchdowns) has developed into a reliable wideout, but the Hogs lack a big-play threat.

DEFENSE

Under first-year coordinator Robb Smith, an improved defense carried Arkansas to a 7-6 season with unprecedented consecutive SEC shutouts, 17-0 and 30-0, over LSU and Ole Miss.

The roster turnover on defense — most notably linebacker Martrell Spaight, defensive end Trey Flowers, tackle Darius Philon, safety Alan Turner and nickel back Tevin Mitchel — has left a void.

Arkansas' hope is that several players are approaching significant jumps, and one of those might be two-year starter Brooks Ellis. He moved to Spaight's play-making weakside linebacker spot this spring and excelled in that position, while sophomore Khalia Hackett emerged in the middle.

Josh Harris, the 5-10 walk-on backup middle linebacker who plays much taller than his height, was among the bigger stories of the Arkansas spring. Junior Josh Williams and sophomore Dwayne Eugene have experienced all three linebacker spots.

Even minus Turner and Mitchel, the secondary overall should improve, given the experience gained by cornerbacks D.J. Dean, Jared Collins, Henre' Toliver and Kevin Richardson. Toliver and Richardson now are more nickel backs, however.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Arkansas signed a highly touted incoming freshman punter, Blake Johnson from Los Alamitos, Calif., to try to replace graduated two-year starter Sam Irwin-Hill. He will compete with walk-on Toby Baker. Redshirt freshman kicker Cole Hedlund performed well in the spring, as did Adam McFain and walk-on Lane Saling. The job will be wide open into camp.

OVERVIEW

Shutting out LSU and Ole Miss and drilling Texas had the Hogs brimming with confidence through the spring and into the summer of Bielema's third year. It's easy to see the progress and talent of the program, but an SEC schedule that includes only three home games might not be conducive to great strides. On the other hand, Arkansas will be a very tough out.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Dominique Reed: The transfer from Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College was expressly recruited for the deep-threat speed that Arkansas lacks. "He was the No. 1 guy on our board for a reason," coach Bret Bielema said. Reed was a four-star JC recruit, according to 247Sports.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	10	**Brandon Allen***	6-3	210	Sr.
RB	32	**Jonathan Williams***	6-0	224	Sr.
FB	24	Kody Walker	6-2	250	Sr.
WR	4	**Keon Hatcher***	6-2	210	Sr.
WR	1	Jared Cornelius	5-11	195	So.
TE	84	**Hunter Henry***	6-5	250	Jr.
LT	55	**Denver Kirkland***	6-5	343	Jr.
LG	73	**Sebastian Tretola***	6-5	322	Sr.
C	65	**Mitch Smothers***	6-3	315	Sr.
RG	72	Frank Ragnow	6-5	311	So.
RT	70	**Dan Skipper***	6-10	307	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	6	**JaMichael Winston***	6-4	272	Jr.
DT	94	**Taiwan Johnson***	6-2	273	Jr.
DT	93	DeMarcus Hodge	6-1	340	Sr.
DE	97	Tevin Beanum	6-4	271	So.
LB	51	**Brooks Ellis***	6-2	237	Jr.
LB	27	Khalia Hackett	6-2	232	So.
LB	21	**Josh Williams***	6-1	243	Jr.
CB	29	**Jared Collins***	5-11	172	Jr.
CB	2	D.J. Dean	5-11	200	Jr.
SS	26	**Rohan Gaines***	5-11	195	Sr.
FS	28	Josh Liddell	6-1	209	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	48	**Adam McFain***	6-0	180	Jr.
P	37	Toby Baker	6-3	202	Jr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	UTEP
Sept. 12	TOLEDO
Sept. 19	TEXAS TECH
Sept. 26	vs. TEXAS A&M (Arlington, TX)
Oct. 3	at Tennessee
Oct. 10	at Alabama
Oct. 24	AUBURN
Oct. 31	UT-MARTIN
Nov. 7	at Ole Miss
Nov. 14	at LSU
Nov. 21	MISSISSIPPI STATE
Nov. 28	MISSOURI

2014 RESULTS

L	at Auburn	21-45
W	NICHOLLS STATE	73-7
W	at Texas Tech	49-28
W	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	52-14
L	vs. Texas A&M (Arlington, TX)	28-35
L	ALABAMA	13-14
L	vs. Georgia (Little Rock, AR)	32-45
W	UAB	45-17
L	at Mississippi State	10-17
W	LSU	17-0
W	OLE MISS	30-0
L	at Missouri	14-21
	Texas Bowl	
W	vs. Texas	31-7

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	31.9	42
Rushing	218.0	24
Passing	188.0	100
Total	406.0	60
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	19.2	10
Rushing	114.6	12
Passing	208.8	37
Total	323.4	10
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 7	+ 0.54	T-27

OLE MISS | REBELS

SEC rank: 9 Record: 9-4 SEC record: 5-3 (3rd, West) Stadium: Vaught-Hemingway (60,580)

RANKING 28

REBELS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Oxford, Miss.
COACH: Hugh Freeze — At Ole Miss: 24-15, 3 years; overall: 54-22, 6 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Dan Werner, Matt Luke
DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Dave Wommack, Jason Jones

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1963
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2011
RETURNING STARTERS: 18; 9 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: WR Laquon Treadwell, WR Damore'ea Stringfellow, TE Evan Engram, LT Laremy Tunsil, DE Marquis Haynes, DT Robert Nkemdiche, LB C.J. Johnson, DB Tony Conner

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: There's as much top-end talent at Ole Miss as anywhere in the SEC, particularly at the skill positions (Treadwell, Engram) and on defense (Robert Nkemdiche, Conner). The No. 1 scoring defense from last season returns seven starters and has tons of two- and three-year contributors. And there's continuity on the staff, with the major coordinators returning for their fourth seasons.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Ole Miss lost two of its last three games, in part because of injuries, but also because opposing defenses beat up the offensive line and shut down the running game. Ole Miss has to make dramatic improvements on the line and at running back, but will largely be hoping returning starters play better than they did in 2014. Both cornerbacks are also new to major college football.

OFFENSE

Ole Miss needs a quarterback to replace three-year starter Bo Wallace, who set multiple school records. Redshirt sophomore Ryan Buchanan exited spring practice as the leader, but only by a small amount over transfer Chad Kelly. Both could play at the start of the season.

Top-notch targets abound. Wide receivers Laquon Treadwell, Damore'ea Stringfellow and Cody Core, and tight end Evan Engram, headline a deep and talented group catching passes.

Left tackle Laremy Tunsil could end up being the team's best NFL prospect; he is part of a line that returns five starters. But underclassmen Javon Patterson and Rod Taylor could push their way into the starting lineup, because that line was 12th in the SEC in sacks allowed.

They'll be blocking for running backs Jaylen Walton and Jordan Wilkins. Walton led the team with 586 yards and five touchdowns last season.

DEFENSE

It'll be difficult for Ole Miss to replicate what its defense did in 2014, when it allowed a nation-low 16.0 points per game. Two All-American members of the secondary graduated, as did both linebackers in the team's 4-2-5 scheme.

What should keep the defense among the best is a core group of players who are All-SEC, if not All-American, players. Defensive tackle Robert Nkemdiche is among the best and brightest; he commands constant double-teams and helps players like end Marquis Haynes (team-high 7.5 sacks as a freshman) and nose tackle Issac Gross make big plays.

C.J. Johnson is moving to middle linebacker after playing end; he should start alongside former All-SEC player Denzel Nkemdiche. Linebacker is where Ole Miss is thinnest on the defense, and both players have battled injuries during their careers.

Tony Bridges and Tee Shepard take over at corner-

ROBERT NKEMDICHE
Photo by AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis

"He's worked his butt off to come back as fast as he has."
— QB Ryan Buchanan, on WR Laquon Treadwell's recovery from last season's leg injury

back (Mike Hilton, who led the team in tackles from there last season, will play safety). Hilton and safety Trae Elston are seniors who have been starting for the Rebels since they were freshmen.

But what makes the secondary potentially special is Tony Conner. He plays the nickel corner spot, but is really a hybrid safety/cornerback/linebacker, depending on the opponent and coordinator Dave Wommack's scheme.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Ole Miss is set with a pair of sophomores. Gary Wunderlich will kick and Will Gleeson will punt, although the former can do both. The return game has been iffy recently, but freshman Jalen Julius was signed in part because of his ability to affect that part of the game. Walton still figures into things as a kick returner.

OVERVIEW

Ole Miss won its first seven games and rose as high as No. 3 nationally in 2014, signaling the program's arrival on the national stage. Now the Rebels only have to find a way to stay there. Perhaps the answer is just staying healthy. Ole Miss has the goods to compete for the SEC West championship, but the quarterback play could hold back the Rebels.

TOP NEWCOMER

CB Tee Shepard: He's finally healthy after missing the 2014 season with a toe injury that required surgery. Shapard was a five-star prospect out of high school, but did not qualify at Notre Dame and ended up in junior college. He was ticketed to be a starter last year before the injury

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	9	Ryan Buchanan	6-3	208	So.
RB	6	**Jaylen Walton***	5-8	166	Sr.
WR	1	**Laquon Treadwell***	6-2	229	Jr.
WR	3	Damore'ea Stringfellow	6-3	229	So.
WR	88	**Cody Core***	6-3	196	Sr.
TE	17	**Evan Engram***	6-3	227	Jr.
LT	78	**Laremy Tunsil***	6-5	305	Jr.
LG	79	Javon Patterson	6-3	313	Fr.
C	64	**Ben Still***	6-3	298	Sr.
RG	73	Rod Taylor	6-3	320	So.
RT	74	**Fahn Cooper***	6-5	312	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	27	Marquis Haynes	6-3	220	So.
DT	5	**Robert Nkemdiche***	6-4	280	Jr.
DT	94	**Issac Gross***	6-1	250	Sr.
DE	90	**Fadol Brown***	6-4	280	Jr.
LB	10	**C.J. Johnson***	6-2	225	Sr.
LB	4	Denzel Nkemdiche	6-4	280	Sr.
DB	12	**Tony Conner***	6-0	217	Jr.
CB	2	Tee Shepard	6-1	195	Jr.
CB	1	Tony Bridges	6-2	190	Jr.
SS	38	**Mike Hilton***	5-9	182	Sr.
FS	7	**Trae Elston***	6-0	195	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	97	**Gary Wunderlich***	6-0	175	So.
P	94	**Will Gleeson***	6-3	189	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	UT-MARTIN
Sept. 12	FRESNO STATE
Sept. 19	at Alabama
Sept. 26	VANDERBILT
Oct. 3	at Florida
Oct. 10	NEW MEXICO STATE
Oct. 17	at Memphis
Oct. 24	TEXAS A&M
Oct. 31	at Auburn
Nov. 7	ARKANSAS
Nov. 21	LSU
Nov. 28	at Mississippi State

2014 RESULTS

W	vs. Boise State (Atlanta, Ga.)	35-13
W	at Vanderbilt	41-3
W	LOUISIANA	56-15
W	MEMPHIS	24-3
W	ALABAMA	23-17
W	at Texas A&M	35-20
W	TENNESSEE	34-3
L	at LSU	7-10
L	AUBURN	31-35
W	PRESBYTERIAN	48-0
L	at Arkansas	0-30
W	MISSISSIPPI STATE	31-17
	Peach Bowl	
L	vs. TCU	3-42

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	28.3	67
Rushing	155.5	73
Passing	263.6	37
Total	419.1	51

DEFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	16.0	1
Rushing	136.9	29
Passing	192.1	16
Total	329.0	13

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	RANK
+7	+0.54	T-27

MISSISSIPPI STATE | BULLDOGS

SEC rank: 10 Record: 10-3 SEC record: 6-2 SEC (2nd, West) Stadium: Davis Wade Stadium (55,082)

RANKING 31

BULLDOGS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Starkville, Miss.
COACH: Dan Mullen — At Mississippi State and overall: 46-31, 6 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Billy Gonzales, John Hevesy
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Manny Diaz

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1941
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2009
RETURNING STARTERS: 8; 4 offense, 3 defense, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Dak Prescott, WR De'Runnya Wilson, DE Ryan Brown, LB Beniquez Brown, LB Gerri Green, CB Taveze Calhoun

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Prescott is one of the top quarterbacks in the country. The Bulldogs lost four top pass-catchers last year, but still return a load of wideouts. The same is true at linebacker. Despite the NFL poaching leading tackler Benardrick McKinney, MSU's strongest defensive unit will be its linebackers.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The offensive line will feature three new starters, highlighted by a new center. Jamaal Clayborn, the leading candidate to snap to Prescott, hasn't played center since youth football. On defense, Mississippi State was vulnerable against the pass last year. The same could be true with three new starters in the secondary.

DAK PRESCOTT
Photo by Michael Wade

"I feel like they're really overlooking us, feeling like we lost so much."
— LB Beniquez Brown, on expectations of MSU's defense in 2015

OFFENSE

Mississippi State lost seven starters from last year's offense. Dak Prescott provides the attack with the confidence it can again lead the SEC in yards.

MSU lost its second-best weapon in running back Josh Robinson, who declared early for the NFL Draft.

Ashton Shumpert, MSU's most experienced back, finished with fewer than 500 yards in his first two seasons in Starkville. A group of freshmen are fighting for time behind Shumpert, led by Dontavian Lee and Aeris Williams.

Wide receiver could wind up being the deepest position on the team, despite losing two starters.

Fred Ross, Fred Brown and Gabe Myles step into the spotlight this season. Two will become starters. The other will serve as MSU's fourth option. That's because they'll all be looking up at the 6-5 De'Runnya Wilson.

The former high school basketball star led MSU with 47 catches, 680 yards and nine touchdowns last year. The numbers should only increase this year.

The offense surrounding Prescott leads to some optimism in every area except offensive line. MSU moved guard Jamaal Clayborn and tackle Jocquell Johnson to center. Clayborn, who worked with the first-team throughout the spring, hasn't played center since his youth football days.

DEFENSE

Mississippi State lost its leading tackler from the last two seasons (Benardrick McKinney) and its leading sack performer (Preston Smith) from last year. Beniquez Brown will be asked to fill McKinney's production and leadership. Ryan Brown offers similar size to Smith.

A trio of linebackers — senior Zach Jackson, junior Richie Brown and freshman Gerri Green — will help replenish the depth.

The losses on the interior line create a starting spot for former five-star prospect Chris Jones, who is arguably the Bulldogs' most talented defensive player.

The Achilles' heel for Mississippi State last year was its pass defense, as the Bulldogs allowed the most passing yards in the SEC. New coordinator Manny Diaz hopes to improve that area, but Mississippi State lost three starters from last year's secondary, including both safeties.

The Bulldogs return three experienced corners. Taveze Calhoun, Will Redmond and Cedric Jiles possess the talent to turn heads this season.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Evan Sobiesk made 12 of 14 field goal attempts last year but left the team in the offseason to pursue a career in dentistry. Devon Bell is the only kicker on MSU's roster with a made field goal on his resume. MSU removed Bell from field goal responsibilities after he struggled in 2013, making 6 of 14. He'll compete with Westin Graves this year.

OVERVIEW

Mississippi State is coming off its most successful season in program history — 10 wins and a trip to the Orange Bowl for the first time in more than seven decades. MSU lost more than a dozen starters from that team, but brings back the most important piece in Prescott. MSU still will start a majority of upperclassmen in 2015, but the experience will only go so far unless Prescott plays up to his Heisman Trophy expectations.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB Gerri Green: When Dan Mullen took the podium on 2014's Signing Day, the coach emphasized one signing: Gerri Green. After redshirting last year, Green has the opportunity to live up to the praise. At the end of spring practice, Green began working at the first-team middle linebacker.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	15	**Dak Prescott***	6-2	230	Sr.
RB	32	Ashton Shumpert	6-2	218	Jr.
WR	1	**De'Runnya Wilson***	6-5	225	Jr.
WR	8	Fred Ross	6-2	205	Jr.
WR	35	Gabe Myles	6-0	192	So.
TE	84	Darrion Hutcherson	6-7	260	Sr.
LT	77	Rufus Warren	6-7	295	Sr.
LG	70	**Justin Malone***	6-7	320	Sr.
C	60	Jamaal Clayborn	6-4	320	Jr.
RG	62	Devon Desper	6-3	300	Jr.
RT	58	**Justin Senior***	6-5	295	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	48	**Ryan Brown***	6-6	262	Sr.
DT	96	Chris Jones	6-5	308	Jr.
DT	88	Nick James	6-5	325	Jr.
DE	47	A.J. Jefferson	6-3	270	Jr.
LB	42	**Beniquez Brown***	6-1	235	Jr.
LB	44	Gerri Green	6-4	240	Fr.
LB	39	Richie Brown	6-2	235	Jr.
CB	23	**Taveze Calhoun***	6-1	184	Sr.
CB	2	Will Redmond	6-0	185	Sr.
SS	N/A	Jamal Peters	6-1	206	Fr.
FS	17	Deontay Evans	5-10	205	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	40	Devon Bell	6-2	185	Sr.
P	43	**Logan Cooke***	6-5	210	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Southern Miss
Sept. 12	LSU
Sept. 19	NORTHWESTERN STATE
Sept. 26	at Auburn
Oct. 3	at Texas A&M
Oct. 10	TROY
Oct. 17	LOUISIANA TECH
Oct. 24	KENTUCKY
Nov. 5	at Missouri
Nov. 14	ALABAMA
Nov. 21	at Arkansas
Nov. 28	OLE MISS

2014 RESULTS

W	SOUTHERN MISS	49-0
W	UAB	47-34
W	at South Alabama	35-3
W	at LSU	34-29
W	TEXAS A&M	48-31
W	AUBURN	38-23
W	at Kentucky	45-31
W	ARKANSAS	17-10
W	TENNESSEE-MARTIN	45-16
L	at Alabama	20-25
W	VANDERBILT	51-0
L	at Ole Miss	17-31
	Orange Bowl	
L	vs. Georgia Tech	34-49

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	36.9	T-16
Rushing	233.1	21
Passing	280.7	22
Total	513.8	8
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	21.7	23
Rushing	151.5	44
Passing	272.8	114
Total	424.4	84
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 0	+ 0.0	T-59

FLORIDA | GATORS

SEC rank: 11 Record: 7-5 SEC record: 4-4 SEC (3rd, East) Stadium: Ben Hill Griffin Stadium (88,548)

RANKING 38

GATORS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Gainesville, Fla.
COACH: Jim McElwain — At Florida: 1st year; overall: 22-16, 3 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Doug Nussmeier
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Geoff Collins

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2008
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 4 offense, 7 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Kelvin Taylor, WR Demarcus Robinson, WR Brandon Powell, DE Alex McCalister, DE Jonathan Bullard, LB Antonio Morrison, CB Vernon Hargreaves III

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Florida has a top-notch SEC receiver in Robinson, but the real strength for the team is on defense. The Gators return a deep and talented secondary, led by Hargreaves. The loaded secondary should also be aided by a strong defensive line that is expected to rotate up to 10 players.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The offensive line is incredibly inexperienced with only one upperclassman on the roster and only one player who has started a game in college. Florida is also still short on playmakers at the skill positions, with Taylor, Robinson and Powell the only proven threats. Quarterback is also a question mark.

DEMARCUS ROBINSON
Photo by Marvin Gentry-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Florida has an ongoing quarterback competition, although redshirt freshman Will Grier exited spring practice with a lead over sophomore Treon Harris thanks to his quick decision-making and strong arm.

Florida should have a strong stable of running backs, led by junior Kelvin Taylor. He'll be backed up by Birmingham Bowl MVP Adam Lane and true freshman Jordan Scarlett, who could compete for major carries right away.

The Gators still lack many proven threats at receiver, although Demarcus Robinson is back as the go-to guy after finishing fifth in the SEC in receiving with 810 yards and seven touchdowns in 2014.

Shifty running back Brandon Powell has been moved to the slot and should help round out the passing game along with a deep group of pass-catchers at tight end. Sixth-year senior tight end Jake McGee is healthy again after suffering a broken leg in 2014.

Florida has major issues on the line. The Gators, who return only one player who has started a college game, left spring practice with only six healthy scholarship linemen. Florida likely will start a trio of sophomores and a freshman up front.

DEFENSE

Sack threat Alex McCalister is back to lead the defense, along with senior Jonathan Bullard at end. They'll help form the core of a line that has a good blend of experience and talented youth. The Gators will likely rotate eight to 10 players up front, blitzing frequently.

The team is much thinner at linebacker, with two projected starters coming off major knee injuries in leading tackler Antonio Morrison and Jarrad Davis. Their health will bear monitoring in fall camp, although juniors Alex Anzalone and Daniel McMillian had strong springs.

The Gators are loaded in the secondary, led by All-American Vernon Hargreaves III. Sophomore cornerbacks Jalen Tabor and Quincy Wilson are back after productive freshman campaigns, along with senior Brian Poole, who led the team with four interceptions a year ago. Freshman J.C. Jackson might be the best of the bunch, pushing for the starting job opposite Hargreaves.

> "D-Rob is a guy that's got a little something-something to him."
> — Coach Jim McElwain, on WR Demarcus Robinson

SPECIAL TEAMS

Junior Austin Hardin returns after making 7 of 10 field goal attempts, with a long of 52 yards, while splitting kicking duties. Sophomore Johnny Townsend averaged 42.0 yards per punt as a freshman in 2013 before redshirting last year, when 2012 Ray Guy finalist Kyle Christy returned to form.

Florida must replace talented kick returner Andre Debose. Robinson is expected to return kicks, while Hargreaves fields punts.

OVERVIEW

Florida is once again expected to field an excellent defense, led by a fabulous secondary. The Gators are still looking for an offensive turnaround, though, and the arrival of new coach Jim McElwain isn't going to magically make that happen. Florida still needs more players to surround a young quarterback, and everything could get bottled up until an inexperienced line matures. Maybe in 2016?

TOP NEWCOMER

RB Jordan Scarlett: The four-star prospect from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., will compete with Kelvin Taylor and Adam Lane for major carries right away. He earned first-team all-state honors as a senior after helping lead St. Thomas Aquinas to a Class 7A state title.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	7	Will Grier	6-2	197	Fr.
RB	21	Kelvin Taylor	5-10	209	Jr.
WR	**11**	**Demarcus Robinson***	**6-2**	**197**	**Jr.**
WR	85	Chris Thompson	6-0	171	Jr.
WR	4	Brandon Powell	5-9	181	So.
TE	83	Jake McGee	6-6	243	Sr.
LT	78	David Sharpe	6-6	350	So.
LG	**63**	**Trip Thurman***	**6-5**	**310**	**Sr.**
C	54	Cameron Dillard	6-4	309	So.
RG	52	Travaris Dorsey	6-2	323	Fr.
RT	N/A	Martez Ivey	6-5	275	Fr.

DEFENSE

DE	14	Alex McCalister	6-6	238	Jr.
DT	93	Taven Bryan	6-5	275	Fr.
NT	91	Joey Ivie	6-3	293	Jr.
DE	**90**	**Jonathan Bullard***	**6-3**	**277**	**Sr.**
LB	40	Jarrad Davis	6-2	229	Jr.
LB	**3**	**Antonio Morrison***	**6-1**	**225**	**Sr.**
CB	**1**	**Vernon Hargreaves III***	**5-11**	**198**	**Jr.**
CB	23	J.C. Jackson	5-11	196	Fr.
NB	**24**	**Brian Poole***	**5-10**	**208**	**Sr.**
SS	**20**	**Marcus Maye***	**6-0**	**205**	**Jr.**
FS	**42**	**Keanu Neal***	**6-1**	**209**	**Jr.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**16**	**Austin Hardin***	**5-10**	**205**	**Jr.**
P	19	Johnny Townsend	6-1	198	So.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	NEW MEXICO STATE
Sept. 12	EAST CAROLINA
Sept. 19	at Kentucky
Sept. 26	TENNESSEE
Oct. 3	OLE MISS
Oct. 10	at Missouri
Oct. 17	at LSU
Oct. 31	vs. Georgia (Jacksonville, FL)
Nov. 7	VANDERBILT
Nov. 14	at South Carolina
Nov. 21	FAU
Nov. 28	FLORIDA STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	EASTERN MICHIGAN	65-0
W	KENTUCKY (OT)	36-30
L	at Alabama	21-42
W	at Tennessee	10-9
L	LSU	27-30
L	MISSOURI	13-42
W	vs. Georgia (Jacksonville)	38-20
W	at Vanderbilt	34-10
L	SOUTH CAROLINA (OT)	20-23
W	EASTERN KENTUCKY	52-3
L	at Florida State	19-24
	Birmingham Bowl	
W	vs. East Carolina	28-20

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	30.3	53
Rushing	187.7	41
Passing	179.9	104
Total	367.6	93

DEFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	21.1	20
Rushing	116.2	13
Passing	213.6	41
Total	329.8	15

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	RANK
+ 6	+ 0.5	T-30

SOUTH CAROLINA | GAMECOCKS

SEC rank: 12 Record: 7-6 SEC record: 3-5 (T-4th, East) Stadium: Williams-Brice Stadium (80,250)

RANKING 49

GAMECOCKS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Columbia, S.C.
COACH: Steve Spurrier — At South Carolina: 84-45, 10 years; overall: 226-85-2, 25 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Shawn Elliott, Steve Spurrier Jr.
DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Jon Hoke, Lorenzo Ward

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1969, ACC
LAST BOWL: 2007
RETURNING STARTERS: 13; 4 offense, 8 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Connor Mitch, RB David Williams, WR Pharoh Cooper, OT Brandon Shell, DE Marquavius Lewis, LB Skai Moore, LB Jonathan Walton, CB Chris Lammons

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Even after losing its top running back from last year, South Carolina has two players — Brandon Wilds and Williams — it can count on. Cooper is the top returning player in the league at his position. A group of experienced linebackers leads a defense that is a year older and was retooled in the offseason with newcomers.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Two offensive linemen — OT Brandon Shell (shoulder) and OT Mike Matulis (knee) — missed the spring after undergoing major surgeries. There were only six healthy offensive linemen in the spring. There are plenty of bodies along the defensive front, but there's been little production from anyone on the roster.

OFFENSE

What would a Steve Spurrier-coached team be without a quarterback competition?

Connor Mitch and Perry Orth will jockey for the starting spot this fall to replace Dylan Thompson, who set a single-season school passing record in 2014. The replacements have combined to go 3-for-9 passing for 24 yards.

Mitch, a sophomore, is the odds-on favorite. He showed better poise and command of the offense during spring practice than he did a year ago.

Pharoh Cooper, versatile and dynamic, is the leading returning receiver in the SEC after his 1,136-yard campaign a year ago. Only one other receiver on the roster has a catch in a South Carolina uniform.

The running back position, even with the loss of 982-yard performer Mike Davis, should be a strength behind the duo of Brandon Wilds and David Williams. Williams has star potential with his combination of size, speed and vision.

The offense's biggest question mark is the offensive line. Only six players — none of them true tackles — were healthy enough to practice in the spring.

DEFENSE

A line that couldn't create a pass rush or stop the run, combined with an inexperienced secondary, spelled disaster last year. Spurrier knew changes had to be made, so he called old buddy Jon Hoke back to the college game after he spent 13 years in the NFL.

South Carolina has retooled the defensive line, adding nine players in the recruiting class, including four from the post-high school ranks. Defensive end Marquavius Lewis and tackle Dexter Wideman, who both enrolled in January, will provide immediate help.

The linebackers, featuring Skai Moore and Jonathan Walton, should be a team strength as the Gamecocks morph from a 4-2-5 to a 4-3 base defense under Hoke. The nickel package, with senior T.J. Gurley, will continue to be utilized predominately against spread offenses.

SKAI MOORE
Photo by Steve Beyer

"If they're pretty close in ability, you play more than one. Simple as that."
— Steve Spurrier, on his QB battle

The cornerback position — with starters Rico McWilliams and Chris Lammons — should be strong. Kansas transfer Isaiah Johnson, a former Big 12 Defensive Newcomer of the Year, will provide immediate help at safety.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Elliott Fry has been money on kicks inside 40 yards, converting 20 of 22 chances, but he's only 13 of 21 from longer range in the past two years. FAU transfer Sean Kelly, who ranked 36th in the nation in 2013, will take over punting duties.

The return game hasn't been strong in recent years, but both starters return. Shon Carson (20.4-yard average) has been the top choice returning kicks, while Pharoh Cooper (5.0-yard average) fields punts.

OVERVIEW

South Carolina was picked to win the SEC East a year ago but fell on its face, finishing the regular season with a 6-6 record before earning a bowl victory over Miami. The defense has been rebuilt under new co-defensive coordinator Jon Hoke, but there doesn't appear to be enough game-changers on the roster for the Gamecocks to mount a serious challenge in the East.

TOP NEWCOMER

DE Marquavius Lewis: Ranked as the No. 1 JC defensive end in the country by 247Sports, Lewis enrolled in January after having 11 sacks and 20.5 tackles for loss as a sophomore at Hutchinson (Kan.) C.C.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	6	Connor Mitch	6-3	220	So.
RB	22	Brandon Wilds	6-2	224	Sr.
WR	**11**	**Pharoh Cooper***	**5-11**	**208**	**Jr.**
WR	1	Deebo Samuel	6-0	206	Fr.
WR	8	Shamier Jeffery	6-1	196	Sr.
TE	89	Jerell Adams	6-6	231	Sr.
LT	74	Mason Zandi	6-9	313	Jr.
LG	51	Cody Waldrop	6-2	309	Jr.
C	**70**	**Alan Knott***	**6-4**	**268**	**So.**
RG	**75**	**Will Sport***	**6-5**	**304**	**Sr.**
RT	**71**	**Brandon Shell***	**6-6**	**327**	**Sr.**
DEFENSE					
DE	8	Marquavius Lewis	6-3	266	Jr.
DT	**92**	**Gerald Dixon Jr.***	**6-3**	**325**	**Sr.**
DT	52	Phillip Dukes	6-3	324	Sr.
DE	**44**	**Gerald Dixon***	**6-2**	**276**	**Jr.**
LB	**28**	**Jonathan Walton***	**6-0**	**241**	**Jr.**
LB	**10**	**Skai Moore***	**6-2**	**218**	**Jr.**
LB	23	Larenz Bryant	6-0	226	Jr.
CB	**3**	**Chris Lammons***	**5-10**	**185**	**So.**
CB	**1**	**Rico McWilliams***	**5-11**	**188**	**Jr.**
SS	42	Jordan Diggs	6-0	210	Jr.
FS	24	D.J. Smith	5-11	194	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	**29**	**Elliott Fry***	**6-0**	**198**	**Jr.**
P	13	Sean Kelly	5-10	219	Jr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	vs. North Carolina (Charlotte, NC)
Sept. 12	KENTUCKY
Sept. 19	at Georgia
Sept. 26	UCF
Oct. 3	at Missouri
Oct. 10	LSU
Oct. 17	VANDERBILT
Oct. 31	at Texas A&M
Nov. 7	at Tennessee
Nov. 14	FLORIDA
Nov. 21	THE CITADEL
Nov. 28	CLEMSON

2014 RESULTS

L	TEXAS A&M	28-52
W	EAST CAROLINA	33-23
W	GEORGIA	38-35
W	at Vanderbilt	48-34
L	MISSOURI	20-21
L	at Kentucky	38-45
W	FURMAN	41-10
L	at Auburn	35-42
L	TENNESSEE (OT)	42-45
W	at Florida (OT)	23-20
W	SOUTH ALABAMA	37-12
L	at Clemson	17-35
	Independence Bowl	
W	vs. Miami	24-21

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	32.6	39
Rushing	161.0	65
Passing	282.4	20
Total	443.4	33
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	30.4	89
Rushing	212.2	105
Passing	220.5	52
Total	432.7	92
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 2	- 0.15	T-73

KENTUCKY | WILDCATS

SEC rank: 13 Record: 5-7 SEC record: 2-6 (6th, East) Stadium: Commonwealth Stadium (67,942)

RANKING 59

WILDCATS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Lexington, Ky.
COACH: Mark Stoops — At Kentucky and overall: 7-17, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Shannon Dawson
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: D.J. Eliot

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1976, co-champs
LAST BOWL: 2010, BBVA Compass
RETURNING STARTERS: 16; 5 offense, 9 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Patrick Towles, RB Stanley "Boom" Williams, WR Ryan Timmons, DE Jason Hatcher, DT Melvin Lewis, LB Josh Forrest, LB Ryan Flannigan, S A.J. Stamps

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: After never having a full complement of wide receivers or a completely comfortable quarterback, UK seems to have both now for the first time in the Stoops era. Coupled with three proven running backs and a deeper, bigger offensive line, this could be a turning point season for the Cats' offense. Linebackers and safeties should be stronger positions.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: How will UK replace NFL Draft picks Bud Dupree and Za'Darius Smith, bookends for the defensive line last season? The answer might be a more pronounced move to a 3-4 defense, but former role players are going to have to step up, too.

STANLEY WILLIAMS
Photo by Mark Zerof-USA TODAY Sports

"We were one win away, a couple of plays away from a completely different season."

— Center Jon Toth, on 2014

OFFENSE

Kentucky returns almost all of its offensive production, including starting quarterback Patrick Towles, leading rusher Stanley "Boom" Williams and leading receiver Ryan Timmons.

But the Wildcats likely will look dramatically different.

New coordinator Shannon Dawson has changed the way the quarterbacks drop back, the way the offensive linemen stand and even the way the entire unit communicates during a game. The hope is this leads to faster play — Dawson's stated goal is 85 plays per game.

Coaches said they were impressed with Towles in the spring, but they stopped just short of officially naming him the starter after he competed with redshirt freshman Drew Barker. Towles spent much of his offseason perfecting his footwork to improve his accuracy on the intermediate plays.

Kentucky has three running backs who all showed flashes last season in Williams, Jojo Kemp and Mikel Horton. They are running behind a bulked-up, much-deeper line that returns all but one starter from last season.

Even though Kentucky was without several key receivers during the spring as they rehabbed from offseason surgeries, some potential playmakers are back, including Timmons, Garrett Johnson, Dorian Baker and Blake Bone.

DEFENSE

Kentucky's defense lost several players who played significant roles last season. A huge portion of the UK pressure is out the door, including 53.7 percent of its sacks, more than 35 percent of its tackles for loss and nearly half of its quarterback hurries.

The defensive line does have mainstays in seniors Melvin Lewis and Farrington Huguenin.

Newcomers, such as redshirt freshman Denzil Ware and junior Jason Hatcher, likely will play big roles at linebacker as UK continues its shift from a base 4-3 defense to a 3-4. Being able to flip between alignments and schemes offers more options and makes the Cats harder to scout, says coach Mark Stoops.

Linebacker Josh Forrest is the team's leading returning tackler (110), and Ryan Flannigan finished last season with a flourish.

Stoops is taking over coaching the safeties. That group returns A.J. Stamps, who had a team-best four interceptions last season, as well as Marcus McWilson.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kentucky shook up the coaching assignments and is teaching this area by committee. UK is hoping the new alignment will equal more production from a return group that hasn't scored on a punt since 2010 or a kickoff since 2009.

Steadying forces include three-year starting punter Landon Foster and sophomore place-kicker Austin MacGinnis, who was a pleasant surprise last season, including making a school-record 54-yard field goal.

OVERVIEW

Kentucky got close to a bowl game last year and is looking for that breakthrough in Stoops' third season. Losing six straight to end last season just added to the offseason motivation. This time around, the Wildcats have more depth at key positions as the team looks to gather momentum started by the school's commitment to facilities.

TOP NEWCOMER

TE C.J. Conrad: Kentucky hasn't had a productive, true pass-catching tight end since Jacob Tamme left for the NFL in 2008, but the Cats believe they have found one in Conrad, a four-star prospect who enrolled in January. He turned heads in spring scrimmages.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	14	**Patrick Towles***	6-5	241	Jr.
RB	18	Stanley "Boom" Williams	5-9	196	So.
WR	9	Garrett Johnson	5-11	174	So.
WR	6	Blake Bone	6-5	206	So.
WR	1	**Ryan Timmons***	5-10	201	Jr.
TE	15	C.J. Conrad	6-5	245	Fr.
LT	70	**Jordan Swindle***	6-7	309	Sr.
LG	75	**Zach West***	6-4	312	Sr.
C	72	**Jon Toth***	6-5	295	Jr.
RG	69	Ramsey Meyers	6-4	323	So.
RT	73	Kyle Meadows	6-5	285	So.

DEFENSE

DT	67	C.J. Johnson	6-3	297	Sr.
NT	90	**Melvin Lewis***	6-4	342	Sr.
DE	91	Farrington Huguenin	6-4	272	Sr.
LB	6	**Jason Hatcher***	6-3	249	Jr.
LB	45	**Josh Forrest***	6-3	233	Sr.
LB	33	Ryan Flannigan	6-2	220	Sr.
LB	35	Denzil Ware	6-2	249	Fr.
CB	3	**Fred Tiller***	6-0	177	Sr.
CB	16	**Cody Quinn***	5-10	174	Sr.
SS	15	Marcus McWilson	6-0	202	Jr.
FS	1	**A.J. Stamps***	6-0	197	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	99	**Austin MacGinnis***	5-10	175	So.
P	9	**Landon Foster***	6-1	178	Sr.

*Returning starters in bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	LOUISIANA
Sept. 12	at South Carolina
Sept. 19	FLORIDA
Sept. 26	MISSOURI
Oct. 3	EASTERN KENTUCKY
Oct. 15	AUBURN
Oct. 24	at Mississippi State
Oct. 31	TENNESSEE
Nov. 7	at Georgia
Nov. 14	at Vanderbilt
Nov. 21	CHARLOTTE
Nov. 28	LOUISVILLE

2014 RESULTS

W	TENNESSEE-MARTIN	59-14
W	OHIO	20-3
L	at Florida (3OT)	30-36
W	VANDERBILT	17-7
W	SOUTH CAROLINA	45-38
W	ULM	48-14
L	at LSU	3-41
L	MISSISSIPPI STATE	31-45
L	at Missouri	10-20
L	GEORGIA	31-63
L	at Tennessee	16-50
L	at Louisville	40-44

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	29.2	60
Rushing	153.2	T-77
Passing	231.2	63
Total	384.3	79
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	31.3	93
Rushing	191.2	89
Passing	215.8	43
Total	406.9	75
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 8	+ 0.67	19

VANDERBILT | COMMODORES

SEC rank: 14 Record: 3-9 SEC: 0-8 (7th, East) Stadium: Vanderbilt Stadium (40,330)

RANKING 76

COMMODORES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Nashville, Tenn.
COACH: Derek Mason — At Vanderbilt and overall: 3-9, 1 year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Andy Ludwig
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Derek Mason

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1923 (Southern Conference)
LAST BOWL: 2013, BBVA Compass
RETURNING STARTERS: 19; 8 offense, 9 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Ralph Webb, WR Trent Sherfield, TE Steven Scheu, LT Andrew Jelks, LG Spencer Pulley, DT Adam Butler, LB Nigel Bowden, LB Stephen Weatherly, DB Torren McGaster

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Vanderbilt returns almost its entire defense. Helped by schematic changes on defense, the Commodores should be able to get more pressure on opposing QBs and create turnovers with the return of pass rushers Weatherly and Caleb Azubike. Scheu is one of the best tight ends in the SEC.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Questions surround the quarterback position. VU started four QBs in 2014. Sophomore Wade Freebeck might be the leader in the clubhouse, but his less-than-spectacular play as a true freshman and during the spring game is cause for concern. The team lacks sufficient SEC depth along the defensive line.

RALPH WEBB
Photo by Christopher Hanewinckel-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

New play-caller Andy Ludwig made his mark this spring by installing more of a balanced scheme that will emphasize the strengths of the Commodores' lineup.

Sophomores Johnny McCrary and Wade Freebeck are expected to battle for the quarterback job, though redshirt freshman Shawn Stankavage and true freshman Kyle Shurmur could also be factors.

Latevius Rayford and C.J. Duncan are back as likely starters at receiver, but sophomore Trent Sherfield is poised for a breakout season following a highly successful spring campaign. Redshirt freshman Ronald Monroe and incoming freshman Jared Pinkney could also be factors.

Ralph Webb, who rushed for a school-freshman-record 912 yards last season, has became a more well-rounded back. Dallas Rivers will be the No. 2 back and play some fullback as well.

Tight end Steven Scheu led the SEC in receptions among tight ends (39 for 525 yards and four TDs), and the senior has the look of a legit NFL prospect. Nathan Marcus and Sean Dowling could be factors as backups.

The line returns four starters, having added a little more beef to their frames.

DEFENSE

The defense lacked a pass rush or the ability to create turnovers last fall, but coach Derek Mason's move to defensive coordinator resulted in multiple sacks and interceptions during spring action.

Jay Woods moved inside to nose guard to make up for the graduation of Vince Taylor, while Adam Butler and Caleb Azubike return to give the Commodores a pair of veteran bookends. Sophomore Nifae Lealao should be more of a factor at nose guard behind Woods.

Vanderbilt will be loaded at linebacker with promising sophomores Nigel Bowden and Zach Cunningham mixing with veterans, including Darreon Herring. Stephen Weatherly has the potential to be one of the SEC's best pass rushers. Landon Stokes, who has impressed the coaches, and incoming recruit Josh Smith should play immediately.

> "I want to see this team go from a group of players to becoming a group of competitors."
>
> — Derek Mason

Torren McGaster will lead Vanderbilt's secondary. Sophomore Taurean Ferguson emerged at the other corner spot. Andrew Williamson, Oren Burks and Jahmel McIntosh return at safety after a shaky 2014. Mason believes the group is more confident and in command thanks to a year of maturity.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Tommy Openshaw and Hayden Lekacz will handle the kicking duties. Openshaw was 8 of 11 on field goal attempts a year ago, but just 2 of 5 from beyond 40. Punter Colby Cooke returns, working to become more consistent than in his first two years on campus. Darrius Sims is one of the league's most electric kick returners.

OVERVIEW

Vanderbilt is trying to rebound from an abysmal 2014, when the Commodores were not only one of the youngest teams in the country, but also one of the least productive. Mason brings back more than 26 players who started at least five games and hopes the experience and a few changes to the coaching staff will produce better results.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB Josh Smith: He's the highest-rated recruit in Vanderbilt history, ranking 99th overall according to 247sports.com. Smith, who registered 128 tackles, including 25 for loss as a senior, is the brother of current Vanderbilt defensive back Emmanuel Smith.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	12	Wade Freebeck	6-5	224	So.
RB	26	Ralph Webb*	5-10	200	So.
FB	42	Ladarius Banks	6-2	270	Jr.
WR	86	Latevius Rayford*	6-1	192	Jr.
WR	19	C.J. Duncan*	5-11	200	So.
TE	81	Steven Scheu*	6-5	245	Sr.
LT	81	Andrew Jelks*	6-6	305	Jr.
LG	53	Jake Bernstein*	6-4	312	Sr.
C	77	Spencer Pulley*	6-4	300	Sr.
RG	64	Delando Crooks	6-5	312	So.
RT	74	Will Holden*	6-7	312	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	69	Adam Butler*	6-5	305	Jr.
NG	74	Jay Woods	6-3	283	So.
DE	55	Caleb Azubike*	6-4	270	Sr.
LB	45	Stephen Weatherly*	6-5	250	Jr.
LB	52	Nigel Bowden*	6-1	245	So.
LB	41	Zach Cunningham	6-4	234	So.
LB	35	Darreon Herring*	6-1	232	Sr.
CB	5	Torren McGaster*	6-0	196	Jr.
CB	3	Taurean Ferguson*	5-9	185	So.
S	32	Andrew Williamson*	6-1	208	Sr.
S	20	Oren Burks*	6-3	212	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	17	Tommy Openshaw*	6-2	185	So.
P	16	Colby Cooke*	6-3	200	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	WESTERN KENTUCKY
Sept. 12	GEORGIA
Sept. 19	AUSTIN PEAY
Sept. 26	at Ole Miss
Oct. 3	at Middle Tennessee
Oct. 17	at South Carolina
Oct. 24	MISSOURI
Oct. 31	at Houston
Nov. 7	at Florida
Nov. 14	KENTUCKY
Nov. 21	TEXAS A&M
Nov. 28	at Tennessee

2014 RESULTS

L	TEMPLE	7-37
L	OLE MISS	3-41
W	MASSACHUSETTS	34-31
L	SOUTH CAROLINA	34-48
L	at Kentucky	7-17
L	at Georgia	17-44
W	CHARLESTON SOUTHERN	21-20
L	at Missouri	14-24
W	OLD DOMINION	42-28
L	FLORIDA	10-34
L	at Mississippi State	0-51
L	TENNESSEE	17-24

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	17.2	T-116
Rushing	109.3	113
Passing	179.1	105
Total	288.3	122
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	33.3	T-104
Rushing	183.8	86
Passing	218.3	49
Total	402.1	68
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 16	- 1.33	T-121

PICKING THE SUN BELT

Appalachian State Ready to Take Over Atop Sun Belt

For the first time since the 2011 season, the Sun Belt has the same lineup of teams for a second consecutive year. No new team was added for this fall, and no program defected from 2014 for perceived greener pastures.

But that's not the only place where there are no changes.

The same teams that occupied the top seven spots in last year's final standings are expected to do so again in 2015, though in a slightly different order.

Appalachian State looks to nab the 2015 championship in just its second season in the conference. The Mountaineers return 10 starters on each side of the ball from a team that won its last six games after a 1-5 start. The Mountaineers also will enjoy a scheduling advantage with challengers Georgia Southern, Arkansas State and Louisiana all coming to Boone, N.C.

Defending champion Georgia Southern isn't going to go away easily, however. The Eagles have a bit of a chip on their shoulders after their appeal to play in a bowl game following their championship season was denied. Despite their 8-0 league and 9-3 overall record, the Eagles had to sit home for the holidays in serving the final year of their transition period to the FBS level from the FCS.

Circle Oct. 22 on your calendar. That's when Georgia Southern goes to Appalachian State for what could be the Game of the Year in the Sun Belt. On the other hand, Arkansas State at Appalachian State two weeks later could be the pivotal game.

In addition to returning an explosive offense, the big news for Arkansas State is that the Red Wolves kept their coach, Blake Anderson, for a second season after going one-and-done with Bryan Harsin, Gus Malzahn and Hugh Freeze the previous three years.

Coach Mark Hudspeth, meanwhile, has made Louisiana the model of consistency in his four years. The Ragin' Cajuns have been 9-4 in each season, and only a home loss to Appalachian State kept them from sharing the league title in 2014.

Texas State has the offense to contend and gets a break from not having to play Appalachian State. But the Bobcats catch Louisiana, Georgia Southern and Arkansas State all on the road.

South Alabama is looking at transfers, like UAB quarterback Cody Clements, to make up for the loss of 17 starters from last year's bowl team. ULM will pin its hopes on defense. Idaho should have enough on offense to get out of its three-year one-win rut.

— Paul Borden

CONFERENCE PICKS

SUN BELT	Good news	Bad news	Our call
1. Appalachian St.	The Mountaineers get all three of their main conference challengers at home.	Special teams were an issue in 2014, and could be again.	The Mountaineers will pick up where they left off over the second half of 2014.
2. Arkansas State	The Red Wolves return lots of firepower from the conference's No. 2 offense.	The Red Wolves look vulnerable to the pass with a rebuilt secondary.	A stout offense will win the day for the Red Wolves.
3. Georgia Southern	The Eagles play only one of the other three top contenders (Appalachian State).	Only one player with much in the way of experience returns to the line.	The Eagles will contend for a second straight Sun Belt crown but come up short.
4. Louisiana	Elijah McGuire gives the Cajuns the league's No. 1 all-around offensive threat.	A new starter going under center always leaves questions.	Another nine-win season looks to be in the making for the Cajuns.
5. Texas State	A corps of talented veterans makes the Bobcats a team to be reckoned with offensively.	Personnel losses hit the defense especially hard, leaving many holes to fill.	The Bobcats have a good shot at gaining bowl eligibility if the defense performs.
6. South Alabama	An influx of UAB transfers helps make up for key personnel losses.	The defense is facing a complete rebuilding job, putting extra pressure on the offense.	Even with the crop of transfers, the Jaguars will need big breaks to go bowling again.
7. ULM	The Warhawks have some playmakers at receiver and a potentially outstanding defense.	They came out of spring unsettled at quarterback and have no proven running back.	The Warhawks will go as far as their defense will carry them.
8. Idaho	The Vandals look settled at quarterback and have a nice corps of receivers.	Newcomers are going to have to come through on defense.	Idaho has a shot at ending a string of one-win seasons (now at three), but it won't be a big jump.
9. Troy	New coach Neal Brown has the quarterback to run his spread offense.	Lack of experienced depth at OL, LB and in the secondary.	Troy has taken a huge tumble and has a long way to go to challenge again.
10. Georgia State	The offense is an experienced group, and six UAB transfers should help the defense.	Even with an all-conference linebacker, the Panthers have issues defensively.	A friendly schedule could net the Panthers more than just one victory.
11. New Mexico St.	The Aggies have two exciting players in Larry Rose and Teldrick Morgan.	The defense has the experience, but remains young and small.	Last place may be determined Sept. 12 when Georgia State visits Las Cruces.

Lindy's 2015 ALL-SUN BELT TEAM

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Fredi Knighten	Sr.	Arkansas State
RB	Elijah McGuire	Jr.	Louisiana
RB	Matt Breida	Jr.	Georgia Southern
WR	Donovan Harden	Sr.	Georgia State
WR	Rashon Ceaser	Sr.	ULM
TE	Joel Ruiz	Sr.	Georgia State
C	Joseph Scelfo	Jr.	South Alabama
OL	Mykhael Quave	Sr.	Louisiana
OL	Adrian Bellard	Sr.	Texas State
OL	Dalton Bennett	Sr.	Troy
OL	Chris May	Sr.	South Alabama
AP	Teldrick Morgan	Jr.	New Mexico State
K	Aleem Sunanon	Jr.	South Alabama

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	Ronald Blair	Sr.	Appalachian State
DL	Gerrand Johnson	Sr.	ULM
DL	Jay Ellison	Jr.	Georgia Southern
DL	Ja'Von Rolland-Jones	So.	Arkansas State
LB	John Law	Jr.	Appalachian State
LB	Joseph Peterson	Sr.	Georgia State
LB	Hunter Kissinger	Sr.	ULM
DB	Doug Middleton	Sr.	Appalachian State
DB	Montres Kitchens	Sr.	Troy
DB	Mitch Lane	Sr.	ULM
DB	David Mims II	Sr.	Texas State
P	Austin Rehkow	Jr.	Idaho

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Kevin Ellison	Jr.	Georgia Southern
RB	Marcus Cox	Jr.	Appalachian State
RB	Michael Gordon	Sr.	Arkansas State
WR	Ajalen Holley	Jr.	ULM
WR	J.D. McKissic	Sr.	Arkansas State
TE	Braedon Bowman	Sr.	South Alabama
C	Colby Mitchell	Sr.	ULM
OL	Parker Collins	Jr.	Appalachian State
OL	Ryan Melton	Jr.	Texas State
OL	Octravian Anderson	Sr.	Louisiana
OL	Beau Nunn	So.	Appalachian State
AP	Tyler Cain	Sr.	ULM
K	Alex Hanks	Sr.	Georgia Southern

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Lorenzo Jackson	Sr.	ULM
DL	Chuks Ota	So.	Arkansas State
DL	Ryan Edwards	Sr.	Idaho
DL	Tyler Roberts	Sr.	Troy
LB	Marc Millan	Sr.	Idaho
LB	Otha Peters	Jr.	Louisiana
LB	Michael Johnson	Sr.	ULM
DB	Matt Dobson	Sr.	Georgia Southern
DB	Rocky Hayes	Sr.	Arkansas State
DB	Tracy Walker	So.	Louisiana
DB	Trey Caldwell	Sr.	ULM
P	Brandon McKee	Jr.	South Alabama

THE BIG ONES

Sept. 5	Louisiana at Kentucky
Sept. 5	Georgia Southern at West Virginia
Sept. 12	Missouri at Arkansas State
Sept. 12	Appalachian State at Clemson
Oct. 3	Georgia Southern at ULM
Oct. 10	Texas State at Louisiana
Oct. 13	Arkansas State at South Alabama
Oct. 20	Louisiana at Arkansas State
Oct. 22	Georgia Southern at Appalachian State
Oct. 29	Texas State at Georgia Southern
Oct. 31	ULM at Louisiana
Nov. 5	Arkansas State at Appalachian State
Nov. 21	Georgia Southern at Georgia
Nov. 28	Louisiana at Appalachian State
Dec. 5	Texas State at Arkansas State

BOWL CONNECTIONS

New Orleans
SBC Team vs. C-USA

GoDaddy.com
SBC team vs. MAC

Camellia
SBC team vs. MAC

Cure
SBC team vs. AAC

SUN BELT™ CONFERENCE

TOP 10 NFL TALENT

1. David Mims II	CB	Sr.	Texas State	Continues to hone his cover skills.
2. Mykhael Quave	OT	Sr.	Louisiana	Has ability to play guard.
3. Adrian Bellard	OT	Sr.	Texas State	Specializes in knockdown blocks.
4. Montres Kitchens	DB	Sr.	Troy	Known for one-handed picks.
5. Mitch Lane	DB	Sr.	ULM	Veteran performer and hard hitter.
6. J.D. McKissic	WR	Sr.	Arkansas State	Valuable in return game.
7. Doug Middleton	DB	Sr.	Appalachian State	Sure tackler with great speed.
8. Joel Ruiz	TE	Sr.	Georgia State	Rangy, solid receiver.
9. Gerrand Johnson	DT	Sr.	ULM	Strength makes up for lack of size.
10. Chris May	OT	Sr.	South Alabama	Strong, consistent blocker.

*Only draft-eligible players included.

Most Valuable Player	Offensive Player of the Year	Defensive Player of the Year	Newcomer of the Year
Fredi Knighten, QB, Arkansas State	Elijah McGuire, RB, Louisiana	David Mims II, CB, Texas State	Otha Peters, LB, Louisiana

HONOR ROLL

Most Accurate Passer	**Brandon Silvers**	**Troy**
Strongest Arm	**Tyler Jones**	**Texas State**
Best Scrambler	**Fredi Knighten**	**Arkansas State**
Coolest in Clutch	**Taylor Lamb**	**Appalachian State**
Toughest to Bring Down	**Elijah McGuire**	**Louisiana**
Best Hands	**J.D. McKissic**	**Arkansas State**
Most Dangerous Deep Threat	**Ajalen Holley**	**ULM**
Best Pass Blocker	**Mykhael Quave**	**Louisiana**
Best Pass Rusher	**Michael Johnson**	**ULM**
Best Cover Corner	**David Mims II**	**Texas State**
Special Teams Demon	**Teldrick Morgan**	**New Mexico State**

APPALACHIAN ST | MOUNTAINEERS

Sun Belt rank: 1 | Record: 7-5 | Sun Belt: 6-2 (3rd) | Stadium: Kidd Brewer Stadium (24,050)

RANKING 85

MOUNTAINEERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Boone, N.C.
COACH: Scott Satterfield — At Appalachian State and overall: 11-13, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Dwayne Ledford, Frank Ponce
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Nate Woody

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2012, Southern co-champs
LAST BOWL: None
RETURNING STARTERS: 20; 10 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Taylor Lamb, RB Marcus Cox, WR Simms McElfresh, WR Malachi Jones, DE Ronald Blair, LB John Law, LB Keenan Gilchrist, CB Doug Middleton

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: With so many veterans on both sides of the ball returning, this is an experienced group that finished 2014 on a six-game winning streak. It's a deep team with explosive offensive players in Lamb, Cox, McElfresh, and Jones. A strong defensive core is led by Blair, Law and Middleton.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: You can't overlook that this is a team that gave up huge batches of points (52 at Michigan, 47 to South Alabama and, most stunningly, 55 to Liberty) and lost to Southern Mississippi in the first half of the year. Coverage teams were a liability and need to step up.

TAYLOR LAMB
Photo by Rick Osentoski-USA TODAY Sports

"What we have now is a team of guys that have learned how to win."
— Scott Satterfield

OFFENSE

With 10 starters returning, including quarterback Taylor Lamb, who was the 2014 Sun Belt Freshman of the Year, Appalachian State looks to pick up where it left off last season, when it finished on a six-game winning streak.

As he got more comfortable and as the ground game started clicking behind running backs Marcus Cox and Terrence Upshaw, Lamb went on to complete more than 61 percent of his passes, averaging just over 198 yards a game.

Lamb also rushed for 483 yards as the Mountaineers ended up averaging 241.8 yards a game on the ground. Cox (1,415 yards rushing) and Upshaw (573) return.

Wide receiver is another deep position. Simms McElfresh (42 catches, 484 yards), Malachi Jones (36-585), Montez McGuire (25-386) and Bobo Beathard (17-202) were Nos. 1-through-4 in receiving. Tight end Barrett Burns had two touchdown receptions among his 14 catches (129 yards).

The line returns four starters, including an all-conference candidate in tackle Beau Nunn. The only new starter, tackle Davante Harris, actually started the first five games last season before being regulated to a backup role.

DEFENSE

Eight starters return, and that doesn't include defensive end Nathaniel Norwood, who started the last four games and ended his sophomore season with 3.5 sacks.

The only real new face in the starting lineup could be cornerback Brandon Pinckney, who played mostly on special teams as a freshman. Pinckney and junior college transfer Mondo Williams are competing for the spot vacated by Joel Ross, who had three interceptions and a sack in 2014.

The unit overall took some early hits last season, twice giving up more than 50 points in losses to Michigan and Liberty, the latter in overtime. But in the last six games, the Mountaineers held opponents to an average of fewer than 20 points per outing.

Linebacker John Law earned second-team All-Sun Belt honors in leading the Mountaineers in tackles with 91. Defensive end Ronald Blair was in the top 10 in the conference in sacks (six) and tackles for loss (13). Safety Doug Middleton, a first-team all-conference selection, was tied for fourth in the league in interceptions with four.

Middleton was credited with breaking up six other passes and was second on the team in tackles with 74, including six for loss.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Special teams could be a weakness. Punter Bentlee Critcher averaged 40.7 yards per attempt, but Appalachian State's net average was a meager 31.2 yards. Kicker Zach Matics made only 1 of 5 field goal attempts.

OVERVIEW

If the Mountaineers can avoid key injuries and get better play out of their special teams, they have the experience and talent to challenge for double-digit wins and the Sun Belt title. They look to be overmatched in only one game — at Clemson on Sept. 12 — and conference contenders Georgia Southern, Arkansas State and Louisiana all come to Boone.

TOP NEWCOMER

CB Mondo Williams: He was a second-team All-American last season at Iowa Western, helping his team to an 11-0 record by intercepting eight passes and returning one for a touchdown. He will compete with sophomore Brandon Pinckney for a starting corner spot.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	11	Taylor Lamb*	6-2	200	So.
RB	14	Marcus Cox*	5-10	200	Jr.
WR	81	Bobo Beathard*	5-10	185	Sr.
WR	7	Malachi Jones*	6-2	210	Sr.
WR	83	Simms McElfresh*	5-10	180	Sr.
TE	85	Barrett Burns*	6-4	235	Jr.
LT	73	Davante Harris	6-6	275	Sr.
LG	75	Parker Collins*	6-3	295	Jr.
C	60	Jesse Chapman*	6-1	275	Sr.
RG	70	Colby Gossett*	6-6	315	So.
RT	50	Beau Nunn*	6-4	290	So.
DEFENSE					
DE	49	Ronald Blair*	6-4	275	Sr.
NT	72	Tyson Fernandez*	6-2	330	Jr.
DE	40	Nathaniel Norwood	6-2	235	Jr.
LB	6	Kennan Gilchrist*	6-2	210	Jr.
LB	45	Eric Boggs*	6-3	235	So.
LB	88	John Law*	6-0	235	Jr.
LB	11	Devan Stringer*	5-11	195	So.
CB	27	Latrell Gibbs*	5-10	170	So.
CB	18	Brandon Pinckney	6-0	185	So.
S	21	Doug Middleton*	6-0	205	Sr.
S	3	Alex Gray	6-3	210	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	59	Zach Matics*	6-2	195	Sr.
P	91	Bentlee Critcher*	6-1	190	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	HOWARD
Sept. 12	at Clemson
Sept. 26	at Old Dominion
Oct. 3	WYOMING
Oct. 10	at Georgia State
Oct. 17	at ULM
Oct. 22	GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Oct. 31	TROY
Nov. 5	ARKANSAS STATE
Nov. 14	at Idaho
Nov. 28	LOUISIANA
Dec. 5	at South Alabama

2014 RESULTS

L	at Michigan	14-52
W	CAMPBELL	66-0
L	at Southern Miss	20-21
L	at Georgia Southern	14-34
L	SOUTH ALABAMA	21-47
L	LIBERTY (OT)	48-55
W	at Troy	53-14
W	GEORGIA STATE	44-0
W	ULM	31-29
W	at Arkansas State	37-32
W	at Louisiana	35-16
W	IDAHO	45-28

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	35.7	N/A
Rushing	241.8	N/A
Passing	219.8	N/A
Total	461.6	N/A
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.3	N/A
Rushing	152.3	N/A
Passing	195.2	N/A
Total	347.5	N/A
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 2	- 0.17	N/A

ARKANSAS STATE | RED WOLVES

Sun Belt rank: 2 Record: 7-6 Sun Belt record: 5-3 (T-4th) Stadium: Centennial Bank Stadium (30,708)

RANKING 86

RED WOLVES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Jonesboro, Ark.
COACH: Blake Anderson — At Arkansas State and overall: 7-6, 1 year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Walt Bell
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Joe Cauthen

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2013, co-champs
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2010
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 8 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Fredi Knighten, RB Michael Gordon, WR J.D. McKissic, WR Tres Houston, DE Ja'Von Rolland-Jones, DE Chris Stone, LB Xavier Woodson, S Money Hunter

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Red Wolves are rich at the skill positions on an offense that ranked No. 2 in the Sun Belt in scoring and total yards in 2014. Knighten was first team all-conference last year, and there is depth at running back behind Gordon, who got second-team recognition. The pass rush figures to be strong behind Stone and Rolland-Jones.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Though they made big plays on defense in leading the conference in sacks, the Red Wolves also had a tendency to give them up as well. They also had big problems stopping the run, giving up 374 yards rushing in the bowl loss to Toledo. Kicker Luke Ferguson is inconsistent at best.

FREDI KNIGHTEN
Photo by John David Mercer-USA TODAY Sports

"I think we're stronger against the run than we were last year."
— Coach Blake Anderson

OFFENSE

After two years as a backup and known mostly for his running, senior quarterback Fredi Knighten added an effective passing game to his repertoire in 2014, good enough to earn him first-team All-Sun Belt honors. He's the No. 1 reason for optimism for Arkansas State's offense.

Knighten completed 62.3 percent of his passes for just over 252 yards a game, with 24 going for touchdowns against only seven interceptions. And he still found opportunity to rush for 779 yards, second on the team to returning running back Michael Gordon's 1,100.

Knighten welcomes back his top seven receivers, led by wideouts Tres Houston (53 catches 685 yards), J.D. McKissic (52-629) and Dijon Paschal (37-642). Gordon had 25 receptions for 325 yards and four touchdowns, and tight end Darion Griswold also had four touchdown grabs among his 18 receptions.

Sophomore Johnston White, who rushed for 514 yards as a redshirt freshman, provides run support.

Junior right tackle Colton Jackson, who has started every game in his two seasons, is one of three returning starters on the line along with junior Jemar Clark and sophomore Devin Mondie.

DEFENSE

Stopping the run was a major issue for Arkansas State in 2014, when the Red Wolves surrendered an average of 205.2 yards per game, No. 103 out of 125 FBS teams in rushing defense.

Despite the loss of all-conference selections Qushaun Lee and Artez Brown, the defense is in position to step up. Three starters return on the line — ends Ja'Von Rolland-Jones and Chris Stone, and nose guard Chuks Ota — and are joined by run-stuffing UAB transfer Robert Mondie.

Rolland-Jones and Stone give the Red Wolves two excellent pass rushers. They combined for 15.5 sacks among their 78 tackles last year.

Lee led the Red Wolves in tackles last year with 110. Xavier Woodson, who returns to the other linebacker spot, had 95, including nine for loss and four sacks.

Though four of the five starters in the secondary must be replaced, the picture is not all that dire. Safety Money Hunter is the only returning starter, but seniors Chris Humes, a starter in 2013, and Charleston Girley are both returning after seeing their 2014 seasons cut short by injuries. Senior Rocky Hayes and sophomore Blaise Taylor are athletic corners.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Luke Ferguson is a consistent punter (41.4-yard average), but is shaky as a kicker. He was only 8 of 15 on field-goal attempts, including 3 of 9 from beyond 30 yards. He also missed six of 42 PAT attempts.

OVERVIEW

The offensive firepower and an improved defense will have Arkansas State in contention in the Sun Belt, but the first month of non-conference games presents a challenge. First up is a trip to USC followed by a home game against Missouri. The Red Wolves finish the first month at Toledo, which beat them 63-44 in last season's bowl game.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Robert Mondie: A transfer looking for a home after UAB killed its program, Mondie played in 11 games for the Blazers last year after transferring from junior college. He led Coahoma (Miss.) Community College in tackles (49) in his final season there.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	9	**Fredi Knighten***	5-11	189	Sr.
RB	34	**Michael Gordon***	5-9	187	Sr.
WR	23	**J.D. McKissic***	5-11	193	Sr.
WR	15	**Tres Houston***	6-2	188	Sr.
WR	84	Dijon Paschal	6-1	196	So.
TE	19	**Darion Griswold***	6-5	264	Sr.
LT	79	**Jemar Clark***	6-6	304	Jr.
LG	71	Steven Stevens	6-4	296	Sr.
C	74	**Devin Mondie***	6-5	291	So.
RG	77	Daniel Keith	6-2	275	So.
RT	61	**Colton Jackson***	6-4	276	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	42	**Chris Stone***	6-3	252	Sr.
NG	97	**Chuks Ota***	6-2	285	So.
DT	47	Robert Mondie	6-2	303	Sr.
DE	37	**Ja'Von Rolland-Jones***	6-2	224	So.
LB	55	**Xavier Woodson***	6-1	214	Jr.
LB	52	Quanterio Heath	6-2	210	Jr.
CB	3	Rocky Hayes	5-11	177	Sr.
CB	1	Blaise Taylor	5-9	170	So.
S	29	Chris Humes	5-11	207	Sr.
S	8	Charleston Girley	6-0	196	Sr.
S	27	**Money Hunter***	6-1	193	Jr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	15	**Luke Ferguson***	6-0	210	Sr.
P	15	**Luke Ferguson***	6-0	210	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at USC
Sept. 12	MISSOURI
Sept. 19	MISSOURI STATE
Sept. 26	at Toledo
Oct. 3	IDAHO
Oct. 13	at South Alabama
Oct. 20	LOUISIANA
Oct. 31	GEORGIA STATE
Nov. 5	at Appalachian State
Nov. 14	at ULM
Nov. 28	at New Mexico State
Dec. 5	TEXAS STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	MONTANA STATE	37-10
L	at Tennessee	19-34
L	at Miami	41-20
W	UTAH STATE	21-14 (OT)
W	ULM	28-14
W	at Georgia State	52-10
L	at Louisiana	40-55
W	at Idaho	44-28
W	SOUTH ALABAMA	45-10
L	APPALACHIAN STATE	32-37
L	at Texas State	27-45
W	NEW MEXICO STATE	68-35
	GoDaddy Bowl	
L	vs. Toledo	44-63

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	36.7	18
Rushing	216.4	25
Passing	260.1	39
Total	476.5	20
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	30.5	T-90
Rushing	205.2	103
Passing	216.0	44
Total	421.2	83
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+6	+0.46	T-33

GEORGIA SOUTHERN | EAGLES

Sun Belt rank: 3 Record: 9-3 Sun Belt: 8-0 (1st) Stadium: Allen E. Paulson Stadium (25,000)

RANKING 93

EAGLES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Statesboro, Ga.
COACH: Willie Fritz — At Georgia Southern, 9-3, 1 year; overall: 185-70-1, 22 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Doug Ruse
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jack Curtis

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2014
LAST BOWL: None
RETURNING STARTERS: 15; 5 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Kevin Ellison, RB Matt Breida, WR B.J. Johnson, LG Darien Foreman, NT Jay Ellison, DE Quaun Daniels, LB Antwione Williams, FS Matt Dobson

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Breida is a breakaway threat who was a semifinalist for the Doak Walker Award last year as a sophomore. Of his 17 touchdowns, six came on runs of 61 yards or more, including an 88-yarder against Navy. Ellison should be much-improved as a junior. The Eagles should have one of the best defenses in the conference, as experience and talent abound. Dobson is a natural leader.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The offensive line could be an issue in the early going (the Eagles open at West Virginia), although transfers Max Magana and Roscoe Byrd bring experience and size. Injuries could be a problem as the Eagles, in only their second year removed from the FCS, are still not at their full allotment of 85 scholarships.

OFFENSE

Georgia Southern wasted no time establishing itself in the Sun Belt Conference. All the Eagles did in their first year as a member was go 8-0 in league play to win the outright championship after being an eighth-place preseason pick.

The second Eagles team for conference Coach of the Year Willie Fritz will be among the favorites this season, returning plenty of offensive firepower.

All-Sun Belt running back Matt Breida is one of five returning starters. He ran for 1,485 yards and 17 touchdowns to lead a ground game that averaged an eye-popping 381.1 yards per game.

The biggest challenge will be rebuilding a line that lost four starters. Last year's backups, however, got plenty of playing time.

Quarterback Kevin Ellison was a second-team all-conference pick as a sophomore. He ran for 1,096 yards in Fritz's spread option, and threw for 1,001, a number he wants to improve. Wide receivers B.J. Johnson, Montay Crockett, Ryan Longoria and Derek Keaton would shine in a more pass-oriented offense.

The Eagles averaged a un-Fritz-like 12 passes per game last year. Look for that to increase.

DEFENSE

The Eagles led the Sun Belt last season in two key categories: scoring defense and turnover margin, while allowing 388.1 yards per game. Eight starters are back.

Much of the spring was devoted to working on the pass rush, which had problems last season getting to the quarterback. This will be important in the early going, with two starters gone from the secondary.

Senior free safety Matt Dobson, a converted quarterback, had three interceptions last year and he, along with senior middle linebacker Antwione Williams and junior nose tackle Jay Ellison, will provide leadership and experience.

MATT BREIDA
Photo by AP Photo/Savannah Morning News, Brittney Lohmiller

"There's no doubt if we play in a bowl game within five hours driving distance we'll sell 20,000 tickets"

— Coach Willie Fritz

Williams was the Eagles' second-leading tackler last year with 66 and had three of the team's 24 sacks. Dobson had 62 tackles along with three picks.

As to the pass rush, look for senior defensive end Quaun Daniels to lead that surge along with junior defensive end Bernard Dawson. Ellison and junior Jamal Johnson will try to clog up the middle.

Depth will not be a problem for coordinator Jack Curtis, who has 12 seniors on his two-deep.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior punter Ryan Nowicki, a third-year starter, is one of the Sun Belt's best. The kicking game continues to be up and down, with junior Younghoe Koo and senior Alex Hanks showing flashes of brilliance, mixed with inconsistency, the past two years.

OVERVIEW

With a new coach, a new conference and a move from the FCS level, no one knew what to expect of the Eagles last year. Now, anything less than a repeat — Georgia Southern plays the same eight opponents — might be a disappointment. Either way, the future looks bright as Fritz's first two recruiting classes were rated the best in the conference. And, the Eagles will be eligible to go bowling this year as they have completed their transition requirements.

TOP NEWCOMER

OL Roscoe Byrd: Byrd (6-3, 319) signed with the Eagles after UAB dropped football. The senior started 20 games for the Blazers and will be in the hunt for a starting guard spot in his final season of eligibility.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	4	**Kevin Ellison***	6-0	190	Jr.
RB	36	**Matt Breida***	5-10	185	Jr.
WR	31	**Ryan Longoria***	6-2	195	Jr.
WR	12	**B.J. Johnson***	6-1	210	Sr.
WR	23	Derek Keaton	5-10	180	Sr.
TE	33	James Dean	6-1	220	Sr.
LT	62	Ryan Northrup	6-2	285	Fr.
LG	63	**Darien Foreman***	6-2	305	Sr.
C	60	Andy Kwon	6-2	295	Jr.
RG	73	Maurice Hunt Jr.	6-1	290	Sr.
RT	77	Tommy Boynton	6-4	305	So.

DEFENSE

DE	56	**Bernard Dawson***	6-1	245	Jr.
DT	51	Jamal Johnson	6-2	245	Jr.
NT	99	**Jay Ellison***	6-1	305	Jr.
DE	44	**Quaun Daniels***	6-1	230	Sr.
LB	27	**Deshawntee Gallon***	5-9	205	Sr.
LB	37	**Antwione Williams***	6-3	245	Sr.
NB	25	Robert Brice	5-11	185	Jr.
CB	5	Darius Jones	5-9	180	Jr.
CB	19	**Caleb Williams***	5-9	170	Sr.
SS	16	**Antonio Glover***	6-1	195	Sr.
FS	7	**Matt Dobson***	6-2	200	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	9	**Younghoe Koo***	5-10	190	Jr.
P	49	**Ryan Nowicki***	6-1	200	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at West Virginia
Sept. 12	WESTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 19	THE CITADEL
Sept. 26	at Idaho
Oct. 3	at ULM
Oct. 17	NEW MEXICO STATE
Oct. 22	at Appalachian State
Oct. 29	TEXAS STATE
Nov. 14	at Troy
Nov. 21	at Georgia
Nov. 28	SOUTH ALABAMA
Dec. 5	GEORGIA STATE

2014 RESULTS

L	at NC State	23-24
W	SAVANNAH STATE	83-9
L	at Georgia Tech	38-42
W	at South Alabama	28-6
W	APPALACHIAN STATE	34-14
W	at New Mexico State	36-28
W	IDAHO	47-24
W	at Georgia State	69-31
W	TROY	42-10
W	at Texas State	28-25
L	at Navy	19-52
W	ULM	22-16

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	39.1	—
Rushing	381.1	—
Passing	107.2	—
Total	488.3	—
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	23.4	—
Rushing	153.7	—
Passing	234.4	—
Total	388.1	—
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 8	+ 0.67	—

LOUISIANA | RAGIN' CAJUNS

Sun Belt rank: 4 | Record: 9-4 | Sun Belt record: 7-1 (2nd) | Stadium: Cajun Field (31,000)

RANKING 95

RAGIN' CAJUNS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Lafayette, La.
COACH: Mark Hudspeth — At Louisiana: 36-16, 4 years; overall: 102-37, 11 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jay Johnson
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Melvin Smith, Charlie Harbison

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2013, Sun Belt
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2010
RETURNING STARTERS: 10; 6 offense, 4 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB Elijah McGuire, WR Al Riles, WR Jamal Robinson, LG Mykhael Quave, LB Otha Peters, LB Dominique Tovell, SS Tracy Walker

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Elijah McGuire is a big-play threat as a runner and receiver, and a veteran offensive line is in place to protect whoever emerges as the starting quarterback. The linebacker corps is solid, and the Cajuns look to have replacements ready for lost starters in the secondary and up front on defense.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Replacing the production and leadership of QB Terrance Broadway, a three-year starter, is the No. 1 issue heading into the fall. No one emerged in the spring as the likely starter. McGuire is a big producer, but could use some help on offense. DT Christian Ringo and NT Justin Hamilton will be missed.

ELIJAH MCGUIRE
Photo by John Korduner Icon Sportswire via AP Images

OFFENSE

After the luxury of having Terrance Broadway at quarterback for the past three years, coach Mark Hudspeth is looking for someone new to take over Louisiana's attack.

Junior Brooks Haack figured to be the guy after completing 20 of 23 passes in six games last year. But in the spring junior Jalen Nixon and redshirt freshman Jordan Davis made it a three-way competition that will carry over into the fall. Nixon is primarily a runner who completed his only pass attempt in 2014.

The big threat is junior running back Elijah McGuire, who led the Ragin' Cajuns in rushing with 1,264 yards and was the team's leading receiver. He had 45 receptions for 468 yards and returned 15 punts for 116 yards, making him the Sun Belt's leading all-purpose producer with 1,848 yards.

The Cajuns return their No. 3 and 4 pass catchers in wide receivers Al Riles (34 catches for 354 yards) and Gabe Fuselier (30-264) and also return Jamal Robinson, who had 15 receptions for 264 yards in three games before sustaining a season-ending foot injury. He had 54 catches for 862 yards and made second-team All-Sun Belt in 2013.

Three starters, including first-team all-conference selection Mykhael Quave, return up front, although Quave is moving from left tackle to guard. Tackle Octravian Anderson and guard Donovan Williams return to the right side.

DEFENSE

Louisiana faces the difficult task of replacing first-team All-Sun Belt performers Christian Ringo and Justin Hamilton up front, and injury problems in the spring hit the position. Jacoby Briscoe has starting experience, but was limited to seven games last year by ankle problems.

Junior Karmichael Dunbar made a big move in the spring at defensive tackle. Sophomore end Blain Winston and sophomore nose tackle Sherard Johnson came out of spring No. 1 on the depth chart.

> "It's safe to say that I'm not ready to name a starter yet. It'll go into fall camp."
>
> — Coach Mark Hudspeth, on the quarterback situation

The linebacking corps should get a big boost from Arkansas transfer Otha Peters, who sat out last year. Dominique Tovell, the leading returning tackler with 76 stops, and sophomore Tre'maine Lightfoot (29 tackles in seven games) make this a stout position.

Safeties Tracy Walker (two interceptions) and Travis Crawford are returning starters in the secondary. Junior Jevante Watson (one pick), sophomore Simeon Thomas and junior college transfer Christian Goodlett are in the mix at the corners.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Cajuns are looking for a new kicker and punter, and Hudspeth liked what he saw from prospects in the spring. Steven Coutts, a freshman from Australia, looks to handle punting. Walk-on Dylan Scheurich, a redshirt freshman, will take care of PATs, field goals and kickoffs.

OVERVIEW

Louisiana has four consecutive 9-4 seasons under Hudspeth, and the possibility of that or better could be in the future if the Cajuns find the answer at quarterback. Ole Miss and Boise State move off the non-conference schedule, replaced by Kentucky and Akron, and defending league champion Georgia Southern is not among Sun Belt foes.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB Otha Peters: Peters steps in after spending last year as a redshirt following his transfer from Arkansas. Peters played in 17 games in two seasons, including three starts as a freshman in 2012, and could make a huge difference for the Cajuns.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	9	Brooks Haack	6-1	219	Jr.
RB	**15**	**Elijah McGuire***	**5-11**	**198**	**Jr.**
WR	**4**	**Jamal Robinson***	**6-4**	**205**	**Sr.**
WR	**2**	**Al Riles***	**5-10**	**209**	**Jr.**
WR	18	Devin Scott	5-11	180	Jr.
TE	81	Nick Byrne	6-3	228	Jr.
LT	72	Grant Horst	6-5	260	So.
LG	**70**	**Mykhael Quave***	**6-5**	**295**	**Sr.**
C	79	Eddie Gordon	6-1	320	Sr.
RG	**77**	**Donovan Williams***	**6-3**	**315**	**Sr.**
RT	**68**	**Octravian Anderson***	**6-4**	**295**	**Jr.**

DEFENSE

DE	96	Blain Winston	6-4	261	So.
NT	97	Sherard Johnson	6-8	383	So.
DT	55	Karmichael Dunbar	6-2	317	Jr.
Buck	44	Kevin Fouquier	6-4	235	Jr.
LB	7	Otha Peters	6-2	230	Jr.
LB	4	Tre'maine Lightfoot	6-0	232	Jr.
LB	**52**	**Dominique Tovell***	**6-2**	**248**	**Sr.**
CB	**8**	**Simeon Thomas***	**6-3**	**180**	**So.**
CB	11	Jevante Watson	5-10	175	Sr.
SS	**16**	**Travis Crawford***	**5-11**	**185**	**So.**
FS	**23**	**Tracy Walker***	**6-2**	**180**	**So.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	47	Dylan Scheurich	5-8	185	Fr.
P	37	Steven Coutts	6-4	200	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Kentucky
Sept. 12	NORTHWESTERN STATE
Sept. 26	AKRON
Oct. 3	at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 10	TEXAS STATE
Oct. 20	at Arkansas State
Oct. 31	ULM
Nov. 7	at Georgia State
Nov. 12	at South Alabama
Nov. 21	NEW MEXICO STATE
Nov. 28	at Appalachian State
Dec. 5	TROY

2014 RESULTS

W	SOUTHERN	45-6
L	LOUISIANA TECH	20-48
L	at Ole Miss	15-56
L	at Boise State	9-34
W	GEORGIA STATE	34-31
W	at Texas State	34-10
W	ARKANSAS STATE	55-40
W	SOUTH ALABAMA	19-9
W	at New Mexico State	44-16
W	at ULM	34-27
L	APPALACHIAN STATE	16-35
W	at Troy	42-23
	New Orleans Bowl	
W	vs. Nevada	16-3

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	29.5	58
Rushing	225.9	22
Passing	191.5	98
Total	417.4	54

DEFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	26.0	56
Rushing	142.2	35
Passing	263.6	105
Total	405.8	72

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	RANK
- 3	- 0.2	T- 48

TEXAS STATE | BOBCATS

Sun Belt rank: 5 Record: 7-5 Sun Belt record: 5-3 (T-4th) Stadium: Apogee Stadium (30,850)

RANKING 101

BOBCATS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: San Marcos, Texas
COACH: Dennis Franchione — At Texas State: 36-34, 4 years; overall: 210-126-2, 29 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Mike Schultz, Jeff Conway
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: John Thompson

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2004, Sun Belt
LAST BOWL: 2004, New Orleans
RETURNING STARTERS: 12; 7 offense, 5 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Tyler Jones, TB Robert Lowe, WR Brandon Smith, LT Adrian Bellard, NT Dallas McClarty, LB Trey McGowan, CB David Mims II

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Bobcats have lots of weapons on offense with Jones leading the way as a passer and runner. Lowe was a 1,000-yard rusher in 2014. Three starters return to the offensive line, including Bellard, a preseason first-team All-Sun Belt selection. Mims was a first-team all-league pick in 2014.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The defense returns experience, but the losses are huge. Replacing DE Michael Odiari (9.0 sacks), LB David Mayo (a tackling machine with 154 stops) and CB Craig Magher (three interceptions, 10 breakups) will be a big chore. The secondary took a hit when CB Germod Williams unexpectedly left in the spring.

ROBERT LOWE
Photo by Mike Granse-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Quarterback Tyler Jones, a two-year starter, has a strong, accurate arm, having completed 64.5 percent of his passes in two seasons. He's also a rushing threat, with 796 yards over two seasons. Coach Dennis Franchione refers to him as "Cool Hand Luke."

Running back Robert Lowe has amassed more than 2,000 rushing yards in the past two seasons combined, including 1,091 last year. He also is a receiving threat out of the backfield as evidenced by his 24 receptions for 207 yards and a touchdown in 2014. Chris Nuttall returns as a backup after taking care of academic issues that kept him sidelined last year.

The Bobcats return two of their top three receivers in C.J. Best (37 catches, 355 yards) and Brandon Smith (36-414), as well as injury-plagued Jafus Gaines, who had 22 receptions in nine games.

Junior college transfer Chris French also could be a big factor in the passing game after 32 receptions at Saddleback Junior College in California in his freshman season.

The issue up front is finding a replacement for center Matt Freeman, who quit football after recording six starts last season. Left tackle Adrian Bellard, a preseason All-Sun Belt selection, is one of three returning starters.

DEFENSE

The defense suffered key graduation losses — end Michael Odiari, second in the Sun Belt in sacks; linebacker David Mayo, the league's leading tackler who was drafted by the Carolina Panthers; and safety Craig Magher, who had 13 passes defended, including three interceptions.

The unit was stretched even thinner by cornerback Germod Williams' decision in the spring to transfer. Williams played in nine games last year and was second on the team in interceptions with four.

The good news is that the team's interception leader, senior cornerback David Mims II (five), is back, along with senior safety Aaron Shaw (44 tackles).

"We don't want to leave any doubts this year."

— Dennis Franchione

Safety Demetrius Woodard also had four starts in nine appearances last year, so the five-man secondary is not completely depleted.

The situation in the front six is a different matter.

Senior linebacker Trey McGowan, who recorded 80 tackles but no sacks, and tackles Dallas McCarty and Mershad Dillon, are returning starters. But a lack of experienced depth up front is a concern.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Bobcats will count on junior college transfer Lumi Kaba to handle kicking and punting, as Will Johnson did last year. Kaba was a first-team All-American for Tyler (Texas) Junior College in 2014 after going 12 of 14 on field goal attempts and averaging 40.6 yards on 40 punts.

OVERVIEW

The offense put up some big numbers in the last two games, including 45 points in a win over Arkansas State, and it might have to match that production while the team hopes the defense comes around. The Bobcats open at Florida State and three of their toughest Sun Belt games — Louisiana, Georgia Southern and Arkansas State — are on the road, so the schedule isn't very friendly.

TOP NEWCOMER

DE Roosevelt Pearson: A junior college transfer who arrived last year but sat out the 2014 season with a knee injury, Pearson (6-5, 255) had a solid spring and will compete for playing time. He had 74 tackles with 8.5 sacks in two years at Mt. San Jacinto (Texas) College.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	2	Tyler Jones*	6-2	205	Jr.
TB	28	Robert Lowe*	5-10	195	Sr.
WR	5	Brandon Smith*	6-2	170	Sr.
WR	9	C.J. Best	5-10	185	Sr.
WR	80	Jafus Gaines*	5-11	175	Sr.
TE	87	Chris French	6-4	245	So.
LT	64	Adrian Bellard*	6-5	314	Sr.
LG	77	Felix Romero*	6-4	303	Jr.
C	70	Jackson Hoskins	6-5	317	So.
RG	58	Zach Crawford	6-2	315	Sr.
RT	76	Ryan Melton*	6-5	325	Jr.
DEFENSE					
DE	4	Jerrid Jeter-Gilmon	6-1	230	Sr.
NT	63	Dallas McClarty*	5-11	275	Jr.
DT	42	Mershad Dillon*	6-3	300	Sr.
DE	57	Karee Berry	6-3	225	So.
LB	40	Stephen Smith	6-3	221	Jr.
LB	52	Trey McGowan*	6-0	247	Sr.
CB	22	David Mims II*	5-11	198	Sr.
CB	6	Brandon McDowell	5-10	183	So.
WS	2	Demetrius Woodard	6-2	210	Sr.
S	15	Dila Rosemond	5-10	175	So.
FS	9	Aaron Shaw*	5-10	196	Sr.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K		Lumi Kaba	6-2	182	Jr.
P		Lumi Kaba	6-2	182	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Florida State
Sept. 12	PRAIRIE VIEW A&M
Sept. 19	SOUTHERN MISS
Sept. 26	at Houston
Oct. 10	at Louisiana
Oct. 24	SOUTH ALABAMA
Oct. 29	at Georgia Southern
Nov. 7	NEW MEXICO STATE
Nov. 14	GEORGIA STATE
Nov. 19	ULM
Nov. 28	at Idaho
Dec. 5	at Arkansas State

2014 RESULTS

W	ARKANSAS - PINE BLUFF	65-0
L	NAVY	21-35
L	at Illinois	35-42
W	at Tulsa (3OT)	37-34
W	IDAHO	35-30
L	LOUISIANA	10-34
W	at ULM	22-18
W	at New Mexico State	37-29
L	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	25-28
L	at South Alabama	20-24
W	ARKANSAS STATE	45-27
W	at Georgia State	54-31

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	33.8	31
Rushing	238.5	18
Passing	225.9	69
Total	464.4	24
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.7	73
Rushing	202.8	100
Passing	243.3	85
Total	446.1	99
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 7	+ 0.58	25

SOUTH ALABAMA | JAGUARS

Sun Belt rank: 6 Record: 6-7 Sun Belt: 5-3 (T-4th) Stadium: Ladd-Peebles Stadium (40,000)

RANKING 108

JAGUARS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Mobile, Ala.
COACH: Joey Jones — At South Alabama: 37-28 in 6 years; 40-35 overall
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Bryant Vincent
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Travis Pearson

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: None
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2013
RETURNING STARTERS: 7; 3 offense, 2 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Cody Clements, RB Dami Ayoola, WR Danny Woodson II, OL Chris May, DE Jimmie Gipson III, LB Blake Dees, DB Roman Buchanan

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: There is depth and talent at key skill positions on offense, particularly at receiver and running back. Look for Woodson to lead a strong group of pass-catching targets. UAB transfers will have a strong impact on offense at quarterback, and with TE Gerald Everett, WR D.J. Vinson and OL Cameron Blankenship.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The coaching staff is hoping to have a big summer with transfers arriving on offense, the defensive line and linebacker. Only two starters return on defense, and depth has to be developed for South Alabama to be in the hunt for the Sun Belt crown and another bowl invitation.

OFFENSE

South Alabama has the deepest and most-talented collection of offensive players in the program's short history, according to coach Joey Jones. Transfers, most notably from disbanded UAB, are expected to play key roles.

That will certainly be noticed at the position of greatest concern — quarterback.

Cody Clements, who started for UAB last year but missed the Jags' spring practice recovering from an injury, is expected to be the starter. He knows coordinator Bryant Vincent's offense; Vincent was UAB's OC last season. That familiarity will also be noticed at tight end, receiver, offensive line and running back, as former Blazers should fill roles there, too.

Up front, the Jags return Chris May and Joseph Scelfo, but need to add depth. The Jags are deep at receiver (Danny Woodson II, Tyrone Williams, Marvin Shinn, D.J. Vinson) and running back (Terrance Timmons, transfer Dami Ayoola, Xavier Johnson, Tyreis Thomas).

This is expected to be a faster and more fluid offense. Vincent returned to the Jags — he was the team's former quarterbacks coach before becoming coordinator at UAB — in time to coach the team in the Camellia Bowl. His knowledge of returning South Alabama players, as well as the UAB players joining the fold, should prove valuable.

DEFENSE

South Alabama has only two returning starters, and the losses will be most noticeable on the line. Help is also needed at linebacker, but that's not to say there isn't talent.

Blake Dees and Demarius Rancifer enjoyed strong springs at linebacker, and Tre Alford and Jimmie Gipson III have experience on the line. Roman Buchanan is a talented strong safety. He has some experienced help in the secondary, though newcomers may also have a chance to break into the lineup.

Coordinator Travis Pearson loves to play an aggressive, challenging style, and the Jags had success with that plan last year, though they also gave up some big plays that hurt in some games. Help is expected to come in the form of transfers who will enroll during the summer.

ROMAN BUCHANAN
Photo by Scott Donaldson Icon Sportswire via AP Images

"We now have enough athletes to where it's going to come down to the mental side of it."

— Joey Jones

SPECIAL TEAMS

Aleem Sunanon returns at place-kicker, and Brandon McKee, who had the best season of any previous South Alabama punter, also returns. The better news is there is competition. Corliss Waitman redshirted last year and will challenge at punter and, perhaps, as place-kicker.

Newcomers are expected to step into return roles, perhaps incoming freshman Jalen Thompson.

OVERVIEW

The Jags' overall athleticism and talent level is at its highest point, but the Sun Belt is also getting stronger top to bottom, so competing for the league crown will be tough. Someone has to step forward at quarterback, and players must be found who can play significant and quality minutes on the defensive line. A tough schedule also awaits with non-conference games at Nebraska and San Diego State, as well as a home game against NC State.

TOP NEWCOMER

CB/KR Jalen Thompson: The incoming freshman is a strong cover corner who has the chance to break into the defensive lineup. If nothing else, he is expected to have an immediate impact as a kickoff and punt returner.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	7	Cody Clements	6-2	200	Sr.
RB	2	Terrance Timmons	5-7	180	Sr.
WR	**18**	**Danny Woodson II***	**6-1**	**200**	**Sr.**
WR	1	Tyrone Williams	6-2	200	Jr.
WR	8	D.J. Vinson	5-10	200	Sr.
TE	10	Braedon Bowman	6-4	220	Sr.
LT	51	Daniel Aust	6-2	280	Jr.
LG	65	Harrison Louden	6-3	290	So.
C	**66**	**Joseph Scelfo***	**6-1**	**300**	**Jr.**
RG	71	Cameron Blankenship	6-3	285	Sr.
RT	**55**	**Chris May***	**6-5**	**290**	**Sr.**

DEFENSE

JACK	40	Jimmie Gipson III	6-0	255	Sr.
NT	78	Tre Alford	5-10	295	So.
DT	29	Caleb Butler	6-4	250	So.
DE	52	Akeem Lewis	6-2	250	Sr.
LB	49	Demarius Rancifer	6-4	205	Sr.
LB	25	Blake Dees	6-0	245	Sr.
NB	9	Jeremy Reaves	5-11	180	So.
CB	31	Margo Reed	5-7	165	Sr.
CB	15	E.J. May	5-10	180	Sr.
SS	**23**	**Roman Buchanan***	**6-2**	**210**	**Jr.**
FS	**14**	**Antonio Carter***	**5-8**	**190**	**Sr.**

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**97**	**Aleem Sunanon***	**5-7**	**170**	**Jr.**
P	**39**	**Brandon McKee***	**6-1**	**185**	**Jr.**

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	GARDNER-WEBB
Sept. 12	at Nebraska
Sept. 19	at San Diego State
Sept. 26	NC STATE
Oct. 3	at Troy
Oct. 13	ARKANSAS STATE
Oct. 24	at Texas State
Nov. 7	IDAHO
Nov. 12	LOUISIANA
Nov. 21	at Georgia State
Nov. 28	at Georgia Southern
Dec. 5	APPALACHIAN STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	at Kent State	23-13
L	MISSISSIPPI STATE	3-35
L	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	6-28
W	at Idaho	34-10
W	at Appalachian State	47-21
W	GEORGIA STATE	30-27
W	TROY	27-13
L	at Louisiana	9-19
L	at Arkansas State	10-45
W	TEXAS STATE	24-20
L	at South Carolina	12-37
L	NAVY	40-42
	Camellia Bowl	
L	vs. Bowling Green	28-33

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	22.5	102
Rushing	179.0	51
Passing	197.0	94
Total	376.0	84
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	26.4	T-59
Rushing	186.1	87
Passing	212.8	40
Total	398.9	65
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
-7	- 0.54	T-105

LOUISIANA-MONROE | WARHAWKS

Sun Belt rank: 7 Record: 4-8 Sun Belt record: 3-5 (T-7th) Stadium: Malone Stadium (30,427)

RANKING 117

WARHAWKS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Monroe, La.
COACH: Todd Berry — At ULM: 27-34, 5 years; overall: 56-100, 13 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Steve Farmer
DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Adam Waugh, Travis Niekamp

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2005
LAST BOWL: 2012, Independence
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 5 offense, 9 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: WR Ajalen Holley, WR Rashon Ceaser, C Colby Mitchell, DE Ben Banogu, NT Gerrand Johnson, LB Hunter Kissinger, DB Mitch Lane, CB Trey Caldwell

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The defense looks to have to carry the team, at least in the early going. Johnson and Lane were both first-team all-conference in 2014, and Kissinger was second team. The Warhawks have two potential All-Sun Belt wide receivers on offense.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Quarterback remains an issue going into the season, and questions remain about a running attack that produced less than 70 yards a game last season to rank No. 123 out of 125 FBS teams. Returning running backs Kaylon Watson and Nathan Meadors Jr. combined for only 15 carries last year.

OFFENSE

Coach Todd Berry will take over the play-calling duties after a dismal showing by the offense in 2014. He has the experience, having served as the coordinator at several stops, including a previous stint at ULM in 2004-05 before taking over the program in December 2009.

Question is, does he have the players to make his plays work?

The Warhawks have talented receivers, including All-Sun Belt candidates in Ajalen Holley and Rashon Ceaser, who combined for 134 receptions for 1,735 yards last year. Tyler Cain also had 45 catches for 273 yards.

But the coaches remained undecided on the starter at quarterback after the spring.

Veteran Brayle Brown was supposed to start last year, but lost the job to Pete Thomas, who transferred from Colorado State for one season. Brown ended up throwing only 24 passes. Redshirt freshman Garrett Smith and senior Earnest Carrington finished behind him on the depth chart coming out of spring.

Running back is also a question mark. Kaylon Watson and DeVontae McNeal came out of spring as co-No. 1s, but Watson rushed for only 31 yards on nine carries, and McNeal is coming off an injury that cost him all of last season. He rushed for 205 yards on 29 carries in 2013.

Junior college transfer Rey Baltazar and redshirt freshman Jake Snyder look to join three returning starters up front.

DEFENSE

With nine returning starters, including a pair of first-team all-conference performers in nose tackle Gerrand Johnson and "Hawk" Mitch Lane in the secondary, ULM looks to be stout again on defense.

Even though it was placed in difficult predicaments by the problems on offense, the unit still ranked as the Sun Belt's third-leading scoring defense, giving up 26.3 points a game.

GERRAND JOHNSON
Photo by Nelson Chenault-USA TODAY Sports

"We'll play hard. I think that's the first and most important thing."
— Coach Todd Berry

Johnson, a three-year starter, is the anchor up front and was in on a team-high 93 tackles with 12.5 for losses (6.0 sacks). He is flanked on one side by returning veteran Lorenzo Jackson (also 12.5 TFL) and promising newcomer Ben Banogu on the other.

All three linebackers in the 3-3-5 scheme are returning starters. Hunter Kissinger was second-team all-conference last year, and Michael Johnson was second in the Sun Belt in TFLs with 16 among his 83 stops.

The secondary is a salty bunch with four starters back, led by Lane (91 tackles and a team-high three interceptions).

SPECIAL TEAMS

Justin Manton departs after handling place-kicking and punting, but the Warhawks have another double-duty guy in redshirt freshman Craig Ford. If that doesn't work out, the Warhawks also signed punter Chris Qualls in February.

OVERVIEW

If the offense doesn't get things together, the Warhawks could be looking at a repeat of last season. They clearly need more run production to give the playmakers they have at receiver a chance to do their stuff. A schedule that calls for trips to Georgia and Alabama in September doesn't make things any easier.

TOP NEWCOMER

OT Rey Baltazar: One of four junior college transfers who enrolled early, Baltazar emerged from the spring as the starter at left tackle. Baltazar is considered an athletic pass blocker.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	12	Brayle Brown	6-2	207	Sr.
RB	25	Kaylon Watson	6-1	223	So.
WR	**21**	**Ajalen Holley***	**5-10**	**197**	**Jr.**
WR	3	Tyler Cain	5-8	187	Sr.
WR	**2**	**Rashon Ceaser***	**6-0**	**196**	**Sr.**
TE	88	Harley Scioneaux	6-6	253	Sr.
LT	78	Rey Baltazar	6-6	303	Jr.
LG	**75**	**Frank Sutton Jr.***	**6-4**	**295**	**So.**
C	**68**	**Colby Mitchell***	**6-2**	**280**	**Sr.**
RG	72	Jake Snyder	6-2	285	Fr.
RT	**71**	**Chase Regian***	**6-3**	**296**	**So.**
DEFENSE					
DE	49	Ben Banogu	6-4	250	Fr.
NT	**76**	**Gerrand Johnson***	**6-1**	**290**	**Sr.**
DE	**45**	**Lorenzo Jackson***	**6-2**	**244**	**Sr.**
LB	**34**	**Michael Johnson***	**6-2**	**232**	**Sr.**
LB	**48**	**Hunter Kissinger***	**6-3**	**237**	**Sr.**
LB	**5**	**Cody Robinson***	**6-1**	**226**	**Sr.**
CB	**24**	**Trey Caldwell***	**5-9**	**192**	**Sr.**
CB	**1**	**Lenzy Pipkins***	**6-1**	**197**	**Jr.**
Hawk	**7**	**Mitch Lane***	**6-1**	**215**	**Sr.**
S	4	Tre' Hunter	6-0	186	Jr.
S	**20**	**Justin Backus***	**6-2**	**190**	**Jr.**
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	16	Craig Ford	6-2	166	Fr.
P	16	Craig Ford	6-2	166	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Georgia
Sept. 12	NICHOLLS STATE
Sept. 26	at Alabama
Oct. 3	GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Oct. 10	at Tulsa
Oct. 17	APPALACHIAN STATE
Oct. 24	at Idaho
Oct. 31	at Louisiana
Nov. 7	at Troy
Nov. 14	ARKANSAS STATE
Nov. 19	at Texas State
Nov. 28	at Hawaii
Dec. 5	NEW MEXICO STATE

2014 RESULTS

W	WAKE FOREST	17-10
W	IDAHO	38-31
L	at LSU	0-31
W	TROY	22-20
L	at Arkansas State	14-28
L	at Kentucky	14-48
L	TEXAS STATE	18-22
L	at Texas A&M	16-21
L	at Appalachian State	29-31
L	LOUISIANA	27-34
W	at New Mexico State	30-17
L	at Georgia Southern	16-22

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	20.1	112
Rushing	69.5	123
Passing	279.9	24
Total	349.4	106
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	26.3	57
Rushing	183.3	84
Passing	189.9	14
Total	373.3	47
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 1	- 0.1	T-69

IDAHO | VANDALS

Sun Belt rank: 8 | Record: 1-10 | Sun Belt: 1-7 (T-9th) | Stadium: Kibbie Dome (16,000)

RANKING 123

VANDALS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Moscow, Idaho
COACH: Paul Petrino — At Idaho and overall: 2-21, 2 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Kris Cinkovich
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Breske

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1998, Big West
LAST BOWL: 2009, Humanitarian
RETURNING STARTERS: 17; 8 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Matt Linehan, RB Elijhaa Penny, WR Dezmon Epps, OG Jordan Rose, DE Quinton Bradley, LB Marc Millan, LB Kaden Elliss

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: The Vandals will play in the Kibbie Dome six times this year, one more than they did in 2013 and '14. They'll like their chances in the season-opener, at home against Ohio. The return of Epps will help Linehan's development.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Though the offensive line brings back four starters, it loses its center, iron man Mike Marboe, who started every game of his college career. Without its field general, the group could still be in a rebuilding phase.

OFFENSE

Matt Linehan will handle the duties behind center for the second straight year, and a year of experience should help rid the redshirt sophomore of the turnover issues that marred the back end of Idaho's 2014 season.

Linehan spent a bulk of his offseason training with his father Scott, the passing game coordinator for the Dallas Cowboys, and caught a tip or two from Tony Romo along the way.

But to cut down on his 18 interceptions — tied for second-most among FBS gunslingers in '14 — Linehan will need more options out wide and better protection up front.

Graduated senior Josh McCain was the Sun Belt's leading pass-catcher last year, which makes Dezmon Epps' return all the more important.

Epps was Idaho's top receiver in 2013, but he was dismissed from the program last summer for a violation of team rules. He's since been reinstated and will provide Linehan with a sure-handed, zippy option in the slot.

Jacob Sannon and David Ungerer will step into bigger roles, while tight end Deon Watson, a converted receiver, could also be valuable in the passing game.

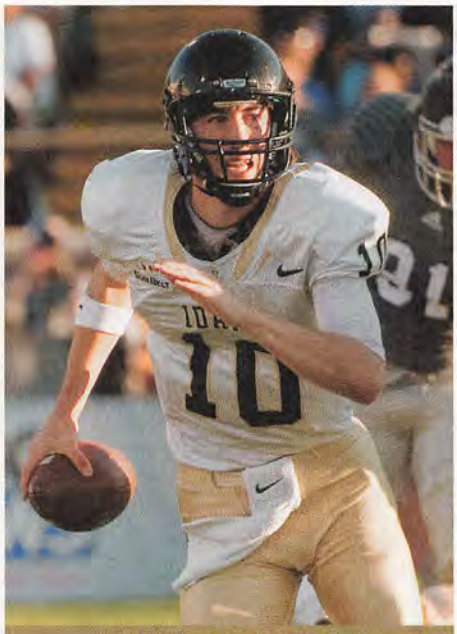
The line returns four players who started in games last season. After allowing 41 sacks last season, the group needs Steven Matlock's transition to center to be seamless.

DEFENSE

When three of his defensive coaches bolted — including coordinator Ronnie Lee — coach Paul Petrino was forced to retool.

He didn't have to go far to do it, though, tapping ex-Washington State DC Mike Breske, whose hiring was yet to be official at the end of the spring. Idaho will now operate under a 3-4 scheme, as opposed to the 4-3 look used last season.

Four starters return to the front seven, bolstered by defensive end Quinton Bradley, who may be more NFL-ready than anyone on the roster, and linebacker Marc Millan, whose 102 tackles were a team-best last season.



MATT LINEHAN
Photo by AP Photo/Savannah Morning News, Brittney Lohmiller

"There won't be many people in our conference that will cover Dez. That's a little different breed of cat."
— Coach Paul Petrino on WR Dezmon Epps

It's a little shakier in the secondary. Idaho conceded nearly 750 passing yards in the spring game and didn't manage a single takeaway. Still, three starters are back in the secondary, including corner Jayshawn Jordan.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Austin Rehkow was selected as a Ray Guy finalist for the second straight season after averaging 47.8 yards per punt a year ago. For the third year, Rehkow will pull double duty as Idaho's kicker. Still a YouTube sensation for the 67-yarder he booted as a high school senior, Rehkow was just 2 of 9 on kicks of 40-plus yards last season.

OVERVIEW

One year after APR sanctions ruled out the possibility of a postseason berth, the Vandals can participate in the offseason. But merely breaking the one-win barrier is the first priority for a team that has collected just five victories in the past four years, including one each of the past three seasons.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB Kaden Elliss: The son of ex-Detroit Lions Pro Bowler Luther Elliss, Kaden was twice the team's leading tackler during spring scrimmages. At 6-3, 209, he gives the linebacker crew a rangier option in pass coverage.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	10	**Matt Linehan***	6-3	202	So.
RB	6	**Elijhaa Penny***	6-2	254	Sr.
WR	1	Dezmon Epps	5-10	170	Sr.
WR	8	**Jacob Sannon***	5-11	185	Jr.
WR	2	David Ungerer	5-8	165	So.
TE	83	**Deon Watson***	6-4	210	Jr.
LT	63	Calvin White	6-5	294	Jr.
LG	55	**Dallas Sandberg***	6-5	303	Sr.
C	61	**Steven Matlock***	6-2	285	Jr.
RG	76	**Jordan Rose***	6-6	323	So.
RT	67	**Mason Woods***	6-9	355	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	43	**Quinton Bradley***	6-3	252	Sr.
NT	55	**Ryan Edwards***	6-3	220	Sr.
DE	44	Tueni Lupeamanu	6-1	301	Jr.
BUCK	44	Leonard Hazewood	6-4	240	Jr.
LB	23	**Marc Millan***	6-1	218	Sr.
LB	10	**Broc Westlake***	6-3	224	Sr.
LB	8	Kaden Ellis	6-3	209	Fr.
CB	4	**Jayshawn Jordan***	5-9	184	Sr.
CB	39	Dorian Clark	6-0	173	So.
S	11	**Russell Siavii***	6-2	200	Jr.
S	21	**Jordan Grabski***	6-0	183	So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	5	**Austin Rehkow***	6-3	215	Jr.
P	5	**Austin Rehkow***	6-3	215	Jr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	OHIO
Sept. 12	at USC
Sept. 19	WOFFORD
Sept. 26	GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Oct. 3	at Arkansas State
Oct. 17	at Troy
Oct. 24	ULM
Oct. 31	at New Mexico State
Nov. 7	at South Alabama
Nov. 14	APPALACHIAN STATE
Nov. 21	at Auburn
Nov. 28	TEXAS STATE

2014 RESULTS

	at Florida	Cancelled
L	at ULM	31-38
L	WESTERN MICHIGAN	33-45
L	at Ohio	24-36
L	SOUTH ALABAMA	10-34
L	at Texas State	30-35
L	at Georgia Southern	24-47
W	NEW MEXICO STATE	29-17
L	ARKANSAS STATE	28-44
L	at San Diego State	21-35
L	TROY	17-34
L	at Appalachian State	28-45

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	25.0	T-88
Rushing	141.9	93
Passing	275.5	30
Total	417.5	53
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	37.3	112
Rushing	246.2	119
Passing	216.5	46
Total	462.7	112
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 11	- 1.0	114

TROY | TROJANS

Sun Belt rank: 9 Record: 3-9 overall Sun Belt: 3-5 (T-7th) Stadium: Veterans Memorial Stadium (30,000)

RANKING 124

TROJANS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Troy, Ala.
COACH: Neal Brown — At Troy and overall: 1st year
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS: Kenny Edenfield, Matt Moore
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Vic Koenning

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2010
LAST BOWL: 2010, New Orleans
RETURNING STARTERS: 16, 8 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Brandon Silvers, RB Brandon Burks, WR Bryan Holmes, WR Jarvis Bentley, C Dalton Bennett, NG Lonnie Gosha, BAN Tyler Roberts, DE Jamal Stadom, MLB Terris Lewis, S Montres Kitchens

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: With Silvers back at quarterback, Troy should be able to move the football provided the offensive line stays healthy and the receiving corps maintains its reliability. Burks and Chunn form a fine tailback duo. Roberts and Stadom can get to the passer. Kitchens is one of the top safeties in the country.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The right side of the offensive line is unproven and there's little experienced depth behind the starters. Although Troy's top-three tacklers return on defense, new faces dot the depth chart at a number of positions and the team will rely on youth to supply depth. Lack of size may detour the team's run-stopping ability.

BRANDON SILVERS
Photo by Michael Wade

OFFENSE

Sophomore Brandon Silvers returns to lead an offense that's looking to rebound following a season in which it averaged just 21.8 points per game. Silvers, a capable runner in addition to an accurate thrower, completed 70.5 percent of his passes for 1,836 yards and 11 touchdowns with only three interceptions.

Joining Silvers in the backfield will be Brandon Burks and Jordan Chunn, who combined for 1,089 rushing yards and nine scores last season. The two had excellent springs, according to new head coach Neal Brown. Josh Anderson and Nick McLaughlin return to anchor the fullback/H-back role.

Bryan Holmes, K.D. Edenfield, Teddy Ruben and Jarvis Bentley give the Trojans a veteran group of receivers. Holmes is the team's top returning pass catcher. Bentley is a big target (6-5, 188) who really made strides this spring, according to Brown. Tight end Tommy Blevins is a good athlete who can fulfill a variety of roles.

Center Dalton Bennett, an All-Sun Belt honorable mention selection a year ago, anchors a retooled offensive line. Left tackle Antonio Garcia has the skill set to play at the next level if he continues to improve.

DEFENSE

Veteran coordinator Vic Koenning is responsible for reshaping a defense that allowed 454 yards and 36.2 points per game last season.

Koenning, in his second stint at Troy — he ran the Trojans' D from 2003-04 — has overseen some big turnarounds in his career, but this may be his biggest challenge, considering the Trojans' lack of talent, size and significant depth at a number of positions.

Improving the team's run defense should be the top priority.

Although Bandit end Tyler Roberts, who led the team with five sacks, and Jamal Stadom (4.5 sacks), can get to the passer, they will need to hold up better against the run so Troy can get teams behind the chains on early downs.

> "Experienced depth is our No. 1 issue at a number of positions, so some young guys are going to have to play."
> — Coach Neal Brown

Veteran nose guard Lonnie Gosha and improving tackle Garrett Peek must also up their play in order for Troy to hold up against the formidable running teams (Georgia Southern, Louisiana, etc.) in the Sun Belt. The same is true at linebacker, which features two junior college signees — William Lloyd and Justin Lucas — and veterans Terris Lewis, Mitchell Roland and Daniel Warren.

First-team all-conference safety Montres Kitchens anchors a secondary that's still solidifying. Kitchens led the Sun Belt in interceptions (six) in 2014 and was the team's top tackler (88).

SPECIAL TEAMS

Ryan Kay will be the punter, but he and Jed Solomon are in an ongoing battle to determine who will handle the team's kicking duties. Solomon will also handle kickoffs. Teddy Rubin and Bryan Holmes are candidates in the return game.

OVERVIEW

Troy's offense has the potential to be better than it was a year ago if the offensive line can hold up, but the defense will have to make a big leap if the Trojans want to bounce back from a dismal season.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB William Lloyd: Helped lead East Mississippi Community College to back-to-back NJCAA national titles in 2013 and 2014 as the leader of a stingy defense. Had a great spring and should contribute immediately at a position of need.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	12	**Brandon Silvers***	6-3	202	So.
RB	32	**Brandon Burks***	5-9	201	Sr.
WR	7	**Teddy Ruben***	5-7	156	Sr.
WR	13	**K.D. Edenfield***	6-0	194	Sr.
WR	18	**Bryan Holmes***	5-10	174	Sr.
TE	88	Tommy Blevins	6-4	240	Sr.
LT	53	**Antonio Garcia***	6-7	295	Jr.
LG	71	Luke Lawrence	6-3	309	Jr.
C	69	**Dalton Bennett***	6-3	301	Sr.
RG	62	Johnathan Boring	6-5	306	Jr.
RT	74	David Gross	6-5	308	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	30	**Jamal Stadom***	6-2	241	So.
DT	92	Garrett Peek	6-3	292	Jr.
NT	98	**Lonnie Gosha***	6-3	306	Sr.
BAN	44	**Tyler Roberts***	6-2	230	Sr.
LB	23	William Lloyd	6-0	209	Jr.
LB	20	Terris Lewis	6-2	237	Jr.
NB	9	Darrin Reddick	6-0	200	Sr.
CB	22	Jalen Rountree	5-11	159	Jr.
CB	3	LaMarcus Farmer	6-0	167	Sr.
SS	15	**JaQuadrian Lewis***	6-1	187	Jr.
FS	1	**Montres Kitchens***	6-0	180	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	99	**Ryan Kay***	6-2	203	Jr.
P	99	**Ryan Kay***	6-2	203	Jr.

***Returning starters in Bold**

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at NC State
Sept. 12	CHARLESTON SOUTHERN
Sept. 19	at Wisconsin
Oct. 3	SOUTH ALABAMA
Oct. 10	at Mississippi State
Oct. 17	IDAHO
Oct. 24	at New Mexico State
Oct. 31	at Appalachian State
Nov. 7	ULM
Nov. 14	GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Nov. 27	at Georgia State
Dec 5	at Louisiana

2014 RESULTS

L	at UAB	10-48
L	DUKE	17-34
L	ABILENE CHRISTIAN	35-38
L	at Georgia	0-66
L	at ULM	20-22
W	NEW MEXICO STATE	41-24
L	APPALACHIAN STATE	14-53
L	at South Alabama	13-27
L	at Georgia Southern	10-42
W	GEORGIA STATE	45-21
W	at Idaho	34-17
L	LOUISIANA	23-42

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	21.8	105
Rushing	164.5	58
Passing	198.8	91
Total	363.3	100
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	36.2	111
Rushing	246.1	118
Passing	207.9	35
Total	454.0	107
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 4	+ 0.33	T-40

GEORGIA STATE | PANTHERS

Sun Belt rank: 10 | Record: 1-11 | Sun Belt: 0-8 (11th) | Stadium: Georgia Dome (28,155)

RANKING 126

PANTHERS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Atlanta
COACH: Trent Miles — At Georgia State: 1-23, 2 years; overall: 21-59, 7 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jeff Jagodzinski
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jesse Minter

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: None
LAST BOWL: None
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 5 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Nick Arbuckle, WR Donovan Harden, WR Robert Davis, TE Joel Ruiz, LB Joseph Peterson, LB Trey Payne, S Tarris Batiste

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Arbuckle has two legitimate receiving targets in Harden and Davis, and the return of Neal from injury, to go with Marcus Caffey, provides a 1-2 punch at running back. There is experience on defense, especially at linebacker and in the secondary.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The offensive line is big (no starter under 300 pounds), but experience is thin. The big fellas need to produce to give the running game a chance. Experience on defense may not be all that big of a plus for a unit that surrendered 43.3 points and 497.1 yards a game last year.

NICK ARBUCKLE
Photo by Michael Wade

OFFENSE

With two quarterbacks and two running backs with starting experience, plus veterans at wide receiver and tight end, Georgia State could get things going on offense.

Senior Nick Arbuckle, who earned a starting role in his first season after transferring from junior college, passed for more than 274 yards per game while completing just over 60 percent of his throws last year. Senior Ronnie Bell, the 2013 starter, backs him up.

Kyler Neal, whose 2014 season was cut to just four games by injury, and leading rusher Marcus Caffey (354 yards on 94 carries) will carry the load in the running game. Neal ran for 209 yards in his abbreviated season.

Receivers Donovan Harden and Robert Davis combined for 110 catches for 1,617 yards in 2014 and will be joined by tight end Joel Ruiz, who caught 39 passes for 478 yards, to form solid receiving options.

The line should benefit from the return of tackle Michael Ivory, who started the first five games before going down for the season with a foot injury. Guard Taylor Evans, however, is the only returning lineman who started more games last season.

DEFENSE

The Panthers return seven starters on defense, although one might question how big a plus that is considering they gave up more than 303 yards per game on the ground. But youth played a big role in their woes in 2014, and the extra year of experience should help.

The Panthers will benefit from the dissolution of UAB's program with six former Blazers on the depth chart, including a likely starter at linebacker in Alonzo McGee and defensive backs Bobby McGee and Demarco Davis in the secondary rotation.

Linebacker Joseph Peterson is an all-conference candidate after leading the team in tackles with 97 stops last year. He also tied for the team sack lead with three of the team's total of 12 and had one of the team's three interceptions. Trey Payne was second on the team in tackles with 88.

Up front, Mackendy Cheridor, coming off a season-ending injury, moves from linebacker to defensive end. Jalen Lawrence and Shawayne Lawrence (no relation) are returning starters up front.

Cornerback Chandon Sullivan and safety Bryan Williams had Georgia State's other interceptions, and safety Tarris Batiste was third on the team in tackles with 86.

> "We still have a few holes we'll have to deal with for the next year or two."
> — Coach Trent Miles

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior Wil Lutz continues to do double-duty. He was 7 of 8 on field-goal opportunities last year and is 19 of 27 in his career, with six of the misses from 48 yards or longer. He averaged 39.2 yards per punt.

OVERVIEW

If the Panthers can stay healthy, they should be much better than they have been in recent years. Just a little more offense could go a long way, as four of the team's losses last year were by 10 points or less. But you have to shudder at the Sept. 19 date. That's when they visit Oregon.

TOP NEWCOMER

LB Michael Shaw: After sitting out 2014, Shaw is expected to have an immediate impact as a redshirt freshman. The Georgia Sports Writers Association named him first-team all-state in Class AAAA after his senior year at Lanie High in Suwanee, and he came out of spring No. 1 at an outside linebacker spot.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	4	**Nick Arbuckle***	6-1	215	Sr.
RB	25	Kyler Neal	5-11	218	So.
WR	9	**Donovan Harden***	5-11	175	Sr.
WR	19	**Robert Davis***	6-3	198	Jr.
WR	17	Glenn Smith	6-1	185	So.
TE	8	**Joel Ruiz***	6-4	240	Sr.
LT	75	Michael Ivory	6-5	340	Jr.
LG	65	**Taylor Evans***	6-4	305	Sr.
C	68	Kelepi Folau	6-3	305	Sr.
RG	63	Davis Moore	6-4	300	So.
RT	78	Dom Roldan	6-6	350	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	5	Mackendy Cheridor	6-5	250	So.
NG	97	**Jalen Lawrence***	6-1	285	Jr.
DE	85	**Shawayne Lawrence***	6-4	270	Jr.
LB	44	Michael Shaw	6-4	210	Fr.
LB	42	**Trey Payne***	6-0	230	So.
LB	6	**Joseph Peterson***	6-0	225	Sr.
LB	4	Alonzo McGee	6-1	220	Jr.
CB	27	**Bruce Dukes***	5-10	195	Sr.
CB	10	**Chandon Sullivan***	5-11	180	So.
S	3	**Tarris Batiste***	6-1	210	Sr.
S	36	Bryan Williams	6-3	200	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	96	**Wil Lutz***	6-0	190	Sr.
P	96	**Wil Lutz***	6-0	190	Sr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	CHARLOTTE
Sept. 12	at New Mexico State
Sept. 19	at Oregon
Oct. 3	LIBERTY
Oct. 10	APPALACHIAN STATE
Oct. 17	at Ball State
Oct. 31	at Arkansas State
Nov. 7	LOUISIANA
Nov. 14	at Texas State
Nov. 21	SOUTH ALABAMA
Nov. 27	TROY
Dec. 5	at Georgia Southern

2014 RESULTS

W	ABILENE CHRISTIAN	38-37
L	NEW MEXICO STATE	31-34
L	AIR FORCE	38-48
L	at Washington	14-45
L	at Louisiana	31-34
L	ARKANSAS STATE	10-52
L	at South Alabama	27-30
L	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	31-69
L	at Appalachian State	0-44
L	at Troy	21-45
L	at Clemson	0-28
L	TEXAS STATE	31-54

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	22.7	100
Rushing	96.3	120
Passing	279.0	25
Total	375.3	T-85
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	43.3	125
Rushing	303.4	124
Passing	193.7	T-19
Total	497.1	116
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 22	- 1.8	125

NEW MEXICO STATE | AGGIES

Sun Belt rank:11 Record: 2-10 Sun Belt: 1-7 (T-9th) Stadium: Aggie Memorial Stadium (30,343)

RANKING 127

AGGIES at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Las Cruces, N.M.
COACH: Doug Martin — At NMSU: 4-20, 2 years; overall 33-73, 9 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Doug Martin
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Zane Vance

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 1960, Border Conference
LAST BOWL: 1960, Sun
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 6 offense, 8 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Tyler Rogers, RB Larry Rose III, WR Teldrick Morgan, WR Andrew Allen, LB Rodney Butler, LB Derek Ibekwe

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: NMSU returns an experienced front line and a young quarterback and running back who have their first FBS years under their belt. The running game could be solid. Perhaps Andre Allen can be a multi-purpose spark to the rest of the offense.
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Most importantly, the jury is still out on a defense that finished 113th nationally last year in yards allowed. There is so much progress that needs to be made, and a lot of things have to go right for NMSU to improve its win total. But health could be an issue, as a variety of players missed all or some of spring practice with injuries.

TELDRICK MORGAN
Photo by Michael Wade

OFFENSE

There was a chance the Aggies could switch to an offense that would take advantage of a mobile, athletic quarterback.

Instead, they moved back-up Andrew Allen — who had a 75-yard run for a touchdown against LSU last year as a quarterback — to wide receiver.

The Aggies seem ready to go back under center with 2014 starter Tyler Rogers. The 6-3 transfer from Arizona Western averaged 231 passing yards per game last season and threw for 19 touchdowns. On the flip side, he was picked off 23 times.

Rogers will work with a young, athletic offense that features sophomore running back Larry Rose III. Even though he missed two games with injury, he rushed for 1,102 yards as a true freshman and scored nine times. As the Aggies look for balance between the run and pass, they will also give carries to hometown product Xavier Hall.

In addition to Allen at receiver, the Aggies have All-Sun Belt player Teldrick Morgan, who snared 75 passes for 903 yards and seven touchdowns in 2014. Josh Bowen and Greg Hogan return with experience as well.

On the line, six players will enter camp with at least some starting experience. The Aggies will have to replace All-Sun Belt center Valerian Ume-Ezeoke.

DEFENSE

The good news for NMSU's defense is that eight of its top 10 tacklers from last year return, led by linebackers Rodney Butler — a returning team captain — and Derek Ibekwe. They were the only two Aggies to top 100 tackles each.

Five of those returners are defensive backs and one — defensive end Kalei Auelua — is from the line.

Linebackers coach Zane Vance was promoted to defensive coordinator. For the most part, he still has the same undersized front line as last year, although it has a little more seasoning. Last year, freshmen had to start games up front, and the results were predictable.

> "We're mentally tougher and physically tougher. We look like a better football team."
>
> — Doug Martin, at the end of spring practice

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Stephan Witkowski returned to his native Australia after averaging 41.1 yards per attempt, leaving NMSU without a punter during spring practice. Place-kicker Alex Louthan, who handled some kickoff duties last season, can also punt, but there could be other options in the fall. Hogan is the top return man for the Aggies from last year, but there was nothing special about the return game.

OVERVIEW

After a solid-looking 2-0 start last year, NMSU fell flat with 10 consecutive losses. With an opener at Florida and a trip to Ole Miss five weeks later, NMSU has an even tougher non-conference schedule this season. The defense could have trouble stopping foes again, so Rogers needs to take a step forward and build on some of his impressive outings of 2014, while cutting back on so many interceptions.

TOP NEWCOMER

WR Tyrian Taylor: He transferred from Iowa's Ellsworth Community College in time to participate in spring practice. Taylor (5-8, 165) will add speed to the offense; he caught a 65-yard touchdown pass in the spring game.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	18	Tyler Rogers*	6-3	200	Jr.
RB	12	Larry Rose III*	5-11	180	So.
RB	22	Xavier Hall	5-8	182	Jr.
WR	19	Teldrick Morgan*	6-0	185	Jr.
WR	6	Joshua Bowen	5-10	175	Sr.
WR	2	Greg Hogan	6-1	182	So.
LT	77	Houston Clemente*	6-4	303	Sr.
LG	62	Isaiah Folasa-Lutui*	6-3	309	Sr.
C	74	Jamin Smith	6-3	275	So.
RG	50	Abram Holland	6-2	270	Jr.
RT	70	Andy Cunningham*	6-3	308	Sr.
DEFENSE					
DE	98	Josh Gibbs	6-5	255	Sr.
DT	95	Stody Bradley*	6-2	240	So.
DT	59	Brandon Agomuo*	6-3	247	So.
DE	48	Kalei Auelua*	6-2	240	Jr.
LB	53	Rodney Butler*	6-1	212	Jr.
LB	3	Derek Ibekwe*	6-0	214	So.
LB	32	Dalton Rocha	6-1	232	So.
CB	29	Lewis Hill*	5-10	175	Sr.
CB	4	Winston Rose*	6-0	174	Sr.
S	16	Kawe Johnson*	5-8	177	Jr.
S	8	Jacob Nwangwa	6-0	177	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	96	Alex Louthan	5-10	190	Jr.
P	96	Alex Louthan	5-10	190	Jr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Florida
Sept. 12	GEORGIA STATE
Sept. 19	UTEP
Oct. 3	at New Mexico
Oct. 10	at Ole Miss
Oct. 17	at Georgia Southern
Oct. 24	TROY
Oct. 31	IDAHO
Nov. 7	at Texas State
Nov. 21	at Louisiana
Nov. 28	ARKANSAS STATE
Dec. 5	at ULM

2014 RESULTS

W	CAL POLY	28-10
W	at Georgia State	34-31
L	at UTEP	24-42
L	NEW MEXICO	35-38
L	at LSU	7-63
L	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	28-36
L	at Troy	24-41
L	at Idaho	17-29
L	TEXAS STATE	29-37
L	LOUISIANA	16-44
L	ULM	17-30
L	at Arkansas State	35-68

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	24.5	92
Rushing	179.3	50
Passing	241.6	54
Total	420.9	49
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	39.1	118
Rushing	309.9	125
Passing	174.5	6
Total	484.4	113
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
- 13	- 1.08	T-116

NOTRE DAME | FIGHTING IRISH

Independent | Record: 8-5 | Stadium: Notre Dame Stadium (80,795)

RANKING 7

FIGHTING IRISH at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Notre Dame, Ind.
COACH: Brian Kelly — At Notre Dame: 45-20, 5 years; overall: 216-77-2, 25 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Mike Sanford
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brian VanGorder

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: N/A
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2009
RETURNING STARTERS: 17; 7 offense, 10 defense

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Malik Zaire, WR Will Fuller, RB/WR C.J. Prosise, OT Ronnie Stanley, DT Sheldon Day, LB Jaylon Smith, CB KeiVarae Russell, S Max Redfield

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: This should be Kelly's best offensive line, with Stanley, a potential first-rounder, at left tackle. Four of the five starters that beat up LSU in the Music City Bowl return, and Notre Dame continued that smash-mouth approach during the spring.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: For how much experience the defense returns, none of it has proven capable of getting to the quarterback. Notre Dame finished with a middling 26 sacks last season, and just 15 of those came from the defensive line. On offense, will Kelly fully commit to the ground game? A true freshman kicker is a question too.

WILL FULLER
Photo by John Pyle/Cal Sport Media

"He's a guy that you're going to fear."
— Brian Kelly, on WR/RB C.J. Prosise

OFFENSE

Notre Dame's offensive line should keep Malik Zaire clean after Everett Golson decided to transfer.

With a line that ranks among the nation's best, coach Brian Kelly has the material to finally make his offense about something other than the guy taking snaps.

The line that powered a meat-grinder game plan in the Music City Bowl returns virtually intact, starting with left tackle Ronnie Stanley. The senior passed on this year's NFL Draft despite getting a second-round grade. Three other linemen are back with starting experience, including a healthy Nick Martin at center.

Junior receiver Will Fuller, who tied the school single-season record with 15 touchdowns last season, leads a diverse receiver corps.

The running back position is talented with Tarean Folston, Greg Bryant and spring surprise C.J. Prosise, a junior on his third position. He could start at running back or slot receiver; either way he was Notre Dame's story of the spring.

Tight end Durham Smythe must step up from role player to starter, filling the biggest hole on offense.

DEFENSE

Notre Dame is getting more mature and healthier.

The combination gives coordinator Brian VanGorder optimism despite a horrid finish, when Notre Dame allowed an average of 41.6 points in the regular season's final seven games. Injuries exposed poor depth, and the youth collapsed under the complexities of VanGorder's NFL scheme.

Now everybody is back, including exiled cornerback KeiVarae Russell, suspended last season following an academic misconduct investigation. Russell started all 26 games of his freshman and sophomore seasons — and the Irish bring back 10 others with starting experience on defense.

Linebacker Jaylon Smith, safety Max Redfield, defensive tackle Sheldon Day and Russell all have star potential.

The question dogging VanGorder is what to do at middle linebacker. Sophomore Nyles Morgan has a high ceiling, but he looked lost at times last season. Senior Jarrett Grace, out since October 2013 because of a horrific broken leg, is healthy. Senior Joe Schmidt, voted team MVP despite missing the final five games with a broken leg, also returns. Who plays? Maybe all three.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Incoming freshman Justin Yoon will take over at kicker, replacing four-year starter Kyle Brindza. Redshirt freshman Tyler Newsome will be the new punter, also taking over for Brindza. The return game could improve if the coaching staff rolls the dice with Fuller and Bryant at the back.

OVERVIEW

Notre Dame replaced more assistant coaches this offseason than starters. The Irish have that much experience coming back in what looks like a College Football Playoff contender. The lingering question — the quarterback issue — resolved itself in early May when Golson announced his intention to transfer. So much for depth at the position, but the clarity could be a benefit to Zaire and the Irish.

TOP NEWCOMER

DT Jerry Tillery: He ran with the starting defense this spring as an early-enrolled freshman and will be relied on this season as Jarron Jones returns from foot surgery. Conditioning won't be a question as Tillery competed in triathlons in high school, even at 6-6, 300 pounds.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	8	Malik Zaire	6-0	222	Jr.
RB	25	**Tarean Folston***	5-9	214	Jr.
WR	7	**William Fuller***	6-0	180	Jr.
WR	2	**Chris Brown***	6-1	195	Sr.
WR	20	C.J. Prosise	6-0	220	Sr.
TE	80	Durham Smythe	6-4	245	Jr.
LT	78	**Ronnie Stanley***	6-5	315	Sr.
LG	56	Quenton Nelson	6-4	325	So.
C	72	**Nick Martin***	6-4	301	Sr.
RG	79	**Steve Elmer***	6-5	315	Jr.
RT	68	Mike McGlinchey	6-7	310	Jr.

DEFENSE

DE	90	**Isaac Rochell***	6-3	287	Jr.
DT	91	**Sheldon Day***	6-2	285	Sr.
DT	94	**Jarron Jones***	6-5	315	Sr.
DE	45	**Romeo Okwara***	6-4	260	Sr.
LB	9	**Jaylon Smith***	6-2	235	Jr.
LB	5	Nyles Morgan	6-1	237	So.
LB	17	**James Onwualu***	6-1	220	Jr.
CB	6	KeiVarae Russell	5-11	190	Sr.
CB	36	**Cole Luke***	5-11	190	Jr.
SS	10	**Max Redfield***	6-1	198	Jr.
FS	22	**Elijah Shumate***	6-0	213	Sr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	NA	Justin Yoon	5-11	185	Fr.
P	85	Tyler Newsome	6-2	205	So.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	TEXAS
Sept. 12	at Virginia
Sept. 19	GEORGIA TECH
Sept. 26	MASSACHUSETTS
Oct. 3	at Clemson
Oct. 10	NAVY
Oct. 17	USC
Oct. 31	at Temple
Nov. 7	at Pittsburgh
Nov. 14	WAKE FOREST
Nov. 21	at Boston College (Fenway Park)
Nov. 28	at Stanford

2014 RESULTS

W	RICE	48-17
W	MICHIGAN	31-0
W	vs. Purdue (Indianapolis)	30-14
W	at Syracuse	31-15
W	STANFORD	17-14
W	NORTH CAROLINA	50-43
L	at Florida State	27-31
W	NAVY	49-39
L	at Arizona State	31-55
L	NORTHWESTERN (OT)	40-43
L	LOUISVILLE	28-31
L	at USC	14-49
	Music City Bowl	
W	vs. LSU	31-28

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	32.8	38
Rushing	159.5	68
Passing	285.5	18
Total	444.9	32

DEFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	29.2	82
Rushing	171.2	72
Passing	233.0	T-75
Total	404.2	71

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	RANK
- 3	- 0.23	T-81

BYU | COUGARS

Record: 8-5, Independent | Stadium: LaVell Edwards Stadium (63,470)

RANKING 46

COUGARS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: Provo, Utah
COACH: Bronco Mendenhall — At BYU and overall: 90-39, 10 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Robert Anae
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Nick Howell

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: 2007, Mountain West
LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING: 2004
RETURNING STARTERS: 14; 7 offense, 6 defense, kicker

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Taysom Hill, RB Jamaal Williams, WR Mitch Mathews, C Tejan Koroma, DL Bronson Kaufusi, DL Travis Tuiloma, KR Adam Hine

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: BYU's offense should be even better in 2015, particularly with the return of Hill and Williams. Defensively, the line should be strong with Kaufusi, Tuiloma, Logan Taele (who started four of the last five games), and returning starters Remington Peck and Graham Rowley in the rotation.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: The Cougars have zero experience behind the oft-injured Hill. Discipline was a big issue last season, as the Cougars were one of the most penalized teams in the country. The discipline problem manifested itself at the end of the Miami Beach Bowl loss to Memphis, and suspensions related to that fight loomed at the end of the spring.

TAYSOM HILL
Photo by Boyd Ivey Icon Sportswire via AP Images

OFFENSE

In an unusual move, BYU brought back senior quarterback Christian Stewart for spring drills. Stewart filled in admirably for Taysom Hill after Hill suffered a season-ending leg injury in early October. Stewart didn't have any eligibility left this spring, but the Cougars were short-handed at quarterback and needed someone for practice.

Hill was ahead of schedule in his recovery and is expected to be BYU's starter this fall, although he didn't see any live action in the spring. The Cougars have a few quarterbacks who will join the program this summer, including Tanner Mangum, the co-MVP of Elite 11 Camp and MVP of the Under Armour All-America Game in 2011. He is returning from a Mormon mission to Chile.

The Cougars boast a talented wide receiving corps led by Mitch Mathews, junior college transfer Nick Kurtz, and veterans Terenn Houk, Devon Blackmon and Colby Pearson.

BYU is hoping running back Jamaal Williams, who sustained a major knee injury late in the season, will be back to full health after rushing for more than 1,200 yards in 2013. Meanwhile, the offensive line, led by Freshman All-America center Tejan Koroma and tackle Ului Lapuaho, is as strong as it has been in years.

DEFENSE

Prior to last season, coach Bronco Mendenhall delegated the role of overseeing the defense and calling the plays to coordinator Nick Howell. But after a season in which the defense struggled, Mendenhall announced in January he would go back to making the defensive calls.

BYU's defensive players say they like the move, and they hope it can signal a return to the strong defense the program had enjoyed for years with Mendenhall at the helm.

In the spring, however, Mendenhall admitted the defense had a long way to go, particularly when it comes to preventing big plays, playing with extreme effort, tackling and being consistent overall.

> "We have a senior quarterback coming back that's one of the best in the country."
>
> — Bronco Mendenhall

Mendenhall likes the Cougars' front seven, headlined by Bronson Kaufusi, who is fourth in career sacks at BYU (15.5). But Mendenhall is admittedly concerned about a secondary that features a lot of inexperience. Young players like safety Kai Nacua and cornerback Micah Hannemann must shore up BYU's pass coverage.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Place-kicker Trevor Samson returns (12 of 14 field goal attempts), but BYU loses punter Scott Arellano. The Cougars' new punter could be a member of BYU's national powerhouse rugby program. Adam Hine, who was one of the nation's top kick returners before suffering an injury, is back for his senior year.

OVERVIEW

BYU plays a formidable schedule in the first month with trips to Nebraska, UCLA and Michigan. The Cougars' lone home game in September is against Boise State. In November, BYU plays Missouri at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City. It's a tough road back to eight wins for a program that is hoping to be invited to a Power 5 conference in the near future.

TOP NEWCOMER

S Eric Takenaka: The Snow Junior College transfer all but wrapped up a starting job during spring practice. BYU coaches like his speed and ability to learn the offense. He'll be counted on heavily in a secondary that lacks experience.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

QB	4	**Taysom Hill***	6-2	232	Sr.
RB	21	**Jamaal Williams***	6-0	206	Sr.
RB	24	Algernon Brown	6-1	229	Jr.
WR	10	**Mitch Mathews***	6-6	215	Sr.
WR	19	Devon Blackmon	6-1	185	Sr.
TE	11	Terenn Houk	6-5	223	Sr.
LT	72	**Ryker Mathews***	6-6	320	Sr.
LG	67	**Kyle Johnson***	6-4	303	Jr.
C	56	**Tejan Koroma***	6-0	280	So.
RG	78	Tuni Kanuch	6-3	325	So.
RT	73	**Ului Lapuaho***	6-7	333	So.

DEFENSE

LE	90	**Bronson Kaufusi***	6-7	265	Sr.
NT	91	**Travis Tuiloma***	6-2	285	Jr.
RE	62	Logan Taele	6-2	280	Sr.
LB	31	Sae Tautu	6-3	235	Jr.
LB	33	Austin Heder	6-2	234	Jr.
LB	53	Jherremya Leuta-Douyere	6-1	236	Sr.
LB	16	Sione Takitaki	6-2	240	So.
CB	7	Micah Hannemann	6-1	200	So.
CB	20	Jordan Preator	6-0	183	So.
S	33	Eric Takenaka	5-10	205	Jr.
FS	12	**Kai Nacua***	6-1	207	Jr.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	27	**Trevor Samson***	5-11	183	Sr.
P	41	Taylor Parker	6-3	195	Fr.

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Nebraska
Sept. 12	BOISE STATE
Sept. 19	at UCLA
Sept. 26	at Michigan
Oct. 2	CONNECTICUT
Oct. 10	EAST CAROLINA
Oct. 17	CINCINNATI
Nov. 6	at San Jose State
Nov. 14	vs. Missouri (Kansas City)
Nov. 21	FRESNO STATE
Nov. 28	at Utah State

2014 RESULTS

W	at Connecticut	35-10
W	at Texas	41-7
W	HOUSTON	33-25
W	VIRGINIA	41-33
L	UTAH STATE	20-35
L	at UCF (OT)	24-31
L	NEVADA	35-42
L	at Boise State	30-55
W	at Middle Tennessee	27-7
W	UNLV	42-23
W	SAVANNAH STATE	64-0
W	at California	42-35
	Miami Beach Bowl	
L	vs. Memphis (2OT)	48-55

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	37.1	14
Rushing	181.8	47
Passing	278.7	26
Total	460.5	26
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	27.5	71
Rushing	121.8	20
Passing	269.7	112
Total	391.5	56
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
-1	-0.08	T-66

ARMY WEST POINT | BLACK KNIGHTS

Independent | Record: 4-8 | Stadium: Michie Stadium (40,000)

RANKING 116

BLACK KNIGHTS at a GLANCE

LOCATION: West Point, N.Y.
COACH: Jeff Monken — At Army: 4-8, 1 year; overall: 42-24, 5 years
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Brent Davis
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: Jay Bateman

LAST LEAGUE TITLE: None
LAST BOWL: 2010, Armed Forces
RETURNING STARTERS: 11; 4 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

PLAYERS TO WATCH: FB Aaron Kemper, SB Joe Walker, C Matt Hugenberg, LB Jeremy Timpf, LB Andrew King, CB Chris Carnegie, CB Josh Jenkins

PRIMARY STRENGTHS: Jenkins and Carnegie are one of the nation's most experienced cornerback tandems. Jenkins could be a candidate for postseason awards. Timpf, a Lott Trophy candidate, is one of the country's top returning tacklers. Hugenberg was the only lineman to start all 12 games last season.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS: Army lacks a clear-cut starter in its triple-option system, which relies heavily on the quarterback. Can QB A.J. Schurr stay away from injuries, which halted his progress last year? Is Ahmad Bradshaw ready to lead the team? The offense lacks proven playmakers. Does the defensive line have size and depth to hold up all season?

JOSH JENKINS
Photo by Kyle Terada-USA TODAY Sports

OFFENSE

Army, now known as Army West Point, will see how effective its triple-option scheme can be as it looks to replace its entire starting backfield.

Fullback Larry Dixon and slotbacks Terry Baggett and Raymond Maples each had 1,000-yard seasons in their careers. Quarterback Angel Santiago led the team in scoring over the last two seasons. In all, Army graduated an eye-popping 10,725 career rushing yards.

The Black Knights head into the preseason undecided at quarterback. Senior A.J. Schurr, who started two games in 2014, missed spring practice following offseason shoulder surgery, giving sophomore Ahmad Bradshaw plenty of snaps and a chance to compete for the starting job in the fall. Bradshaw might be the fastest quarterback to run Army's triple-option in years.

Senior Matt Giachinta, a bruising runner, and junior Aaron Kemper, a big-play threat, will attempt to fill the void at fullback.

Junior Joe Walker, who scored two touchdowns against UConn last season, is the only experienced member of a slotback group that should be quicker and faster.

Army started nine different offensive line combinations in the last nine games of 2014. The return of senior tackle Justin Gilbert, a 2013 starter who missed last year with a torn ACL, gives the unit a boost.

The Black Knights attempted just 105 passes last season. When they do throw, 6-4 junior Edgar Poe is the team's top target over the middle or deep.

DEFENSE

Army is in need of a reboot after holding just one opponent (Navy) to less than 21 points a year ago.

The Black Knights must replace their entire front five (three defensive linemen and two outside linebackers). Coaches are high on sophomore defensive end John Voit, who came on late in 2014. Junior linebacker Seth Combs had an outstanding spring and has a knack for forcing turnovers.

Army will need another solid season from junior inside linebackers Jeremy Timpf and Andrew King. Timpf, the team's top tackler, also covers well. King is effective when blitzing.

> "The defense has to be great and offense has to be great. We aren't going to settle for mediocrity."
>
> — Cornerback Josh Jenkins

Junior cornerback Josh Jenkins is the team's best all-around talent. Jenkins had a team-high four interceptions, made 63 tackles and blocked two punts. Senior cornerback Chris Carnegie is the team's only three-year starter.

Junior Xavier Moss moved from wide receiver to safety in the spring and adds more athleticism to Army's talented secondary.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior kicker Dan Grochowski and senior punter Alex Tardieu have had inconsistent careers and could be pushed by younger talent. Army may look to a freshman as a game-breaker in the return game.

OVERVIEW

The team is starting to embrace coach Jeff Monken's hard-nosed style. Army needs to improve its discipline late in games; it was outscored 149-64 in the fourth quarter. If a quarterback emerges and the defensive line grows, the team should be more competitive in 2015 against a schedule that includes four power-conference teams (Duke, Penn State, Rutgers, Wake Forest).

TOP NEWCOMER

LB Kenneth Brinson: Brinson is quite the athlete. He is a two-time Georgia all-state defensive end, and a three-time state wrestling and track and field champion. Brinson chose Army over Stanford for football.

2015 PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE					
QB	11	A.J. Schurr	6-0	209	Sr.
RB	5	Joe Walker	6-0	199	Jr.
RB	87	John Trainor	5-11	179	So.
FB	25	Aaron Kemper	5-6	212	Jr.
WR	82	**Edgar Poe***	**6-4**	**222**	**Jr.**
TE	2	Kelvin White	6-3	241	Sr.
LT	60	Justin Gilbert	6-7	271	Sr.
LG	70	Mike Houghton	6-4	257	So.
C	53	**Matt Hugenberg***	**6-5**	**309**	**Sr.**
RG	75	**Stefan Moreau***	**6-3**	**293**	**Jr.**
RT	73	**Drew Hennessy***	**6-7**	**283**	**Sr.**
DEFENSE					
DE	59	John Voit	6-3	237	So.
NT	93	T.J. Atimalala	5-11	264	Sr.
DE	48	Shawn Lemoto	6-3	256	Jr.
LB	39	**Jeremy Timpf***	**6-1**	**225**	**Jr.**
LB	11	**Andrew King***	**6-0**	**235**	**Jr.**
LB	13	Seth Combs	6-0	218	Jr.
LB	50	Bayle Wolf	6-0	205	So.
CB	3	**Josh Jenkins***	**6-0**	**196**	**Jr.**
CB	14	**Chris Carnegie***	**6-0**	**200**	**Sr.**
S	9	**Xavier Moss***	**6-2**	**197**	**Jr.**
S	20	Rhyan England	5-10	186	So.
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	95	**Dan Grochowski***	**6-1**	**226**	**Sr.**
P	80	**Alex Tardieu***	**6-4**	**222**	**Sr.**

*Returning starters in Bold

2015 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	FORDHAM
Sept. 12	at Connecticut
Sept. 19	WAKE FOREST
Sept. 26	at Eastern Michigan
Oct. 3	at Penn State
Oct. 10	DUKE
Oct. 17	BUCKNELL
Oct. 24	at Rice
Nov. 7	at Air Force
Nov. 14	TULANE
Nov. 21	RUTGERS
Dec. 12	vs. Navy (Philadelphia)

2014 RESULTS

W	BUFFALO	47-39
L	at Stanford	0-35
L	at Wake Forest	21-24
L	at Yale (OT)	43-49
W	BALL STATE	33-24
L	RICE	21-41
L	at Kent State	17-39
L	AIR FORCE	6-23
W	CONNECTICUT	35-21
L	at Western Kentucky	24-52
W	FORDHAM	42-31
L	NAVY	10-17

2014 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	RANK
Scoring	24.9	90
Rushing	296.5	5
Passing	62.3	125
Total	358.8	102
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
Scoring	32.9	102
Rushing	193.0	93
Passing	237.8	83
Total	430.8	90
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**RANK**
+ 2	+ 0.17	T-51

Wrangler

NATIONAL SCHEDULES

AAC

CENTRAL FLORIDA (UCF)
Sept. 3 FIU
Sept. 12 at Stanford
Sept. 19 FURMAN
Sept. 26 at South Carolina
Oct. 3 at Tulane
Oct. 10 CONNECTICUT
Oct. 17 at Temple
Oct. 24 HOUSTON
Oct. 31 at Cincinnati
Nov. 7 at Tulsa
Nov. 19 EAST CAROLINA
Nov. 27 SOUTH FLORIDA

CINCINNATI
Sept. 5 ALABAMA A&M
Sept. 12 TEMPLE
Sept. 19 at Miami (OH)
Sept. 24 at Memphis
Oct. 1 MIAMI
Oct. 17 at BYU
Oct. 24 CONNECTICUT
Oct. 31 UCF
Nov. 7 at Houston
Nov. 14 TULSA
Nov. 20 at South Florida
Nov. 28 at East Carolina

CONNECTICUT
Sept. 3 VILLANOVA
Sept. 12 ARMY
Sept. 19 at Missouri
Sept. 26 NAVY
Oct. 2 at BYU
Oct. 10 at UCF
Oct. 17 SOUTH FLORIDA
Oct. 24 at Cincinnati
Oct. 30 EAST CAROLINA
Nov. 7 at Tulane
Nov. 21 HOUSTON
Nov. 28 at Temple

EAST CAROLINA
Sept. 5 TOWSON
Sept. 12 at Florida
Sept. 19 at Navy
Sept. 26 VIRGINIA TECH
Oct. 3 at SMU
Oct. 10 at BYU
Oct. 17 TULSA
Oct. 22 TEMPLE
Oct. 30 at Connecticut
Nov. 7 SOUTH FLORIDA
Nov. 19 at UCF
Nov. 28 CINCINNATI

HOUSTON
Sept. 5 TENNESSEE TECH
Sept. 12 at Louisville
Sept. 26 TEXAS STATE
Oct. 3 at Tulsa
Oct. 8 SMU
Oct. 16 at Tulane
Oct. 24 at UCF
Oct. 31 VANDERBILT
Nov. 7 CINCINNATI
Nov. 14 MEMPHIS
Nov. 21 at Connecticut
Nov. 27 NAVY

MEMPHIS
Sept. 5 MISSOURI STATE
Sept. 12 at Kansas
Sept. 19 at Bowling Green
Sept. 24 CINCINNATI
Oct. 2 at South Florida
Oct. 17 OLE MISS
Oct. 23 at Tulsa
Oct. 31 TULANE
Nov. 7 NAVY
Nov. 14 at Houston
Nov. 21 at Temple
Nov. 28 SMU

NAVY
Sept. 5 COLGATE
Sept. 19 EAST CAROLINA
Sept. 26 at Connecticut
Oct. 3 AIR FORCE
Oct. 10 at Notre Dame
Oct. 24 TULANE
Oct. 31 SOUTH FLORIDA
Nov. 7 at Memphis
Nov. 14 SMU
Nov. 21 at Tulsa
Nov. 27 at Houston
Dec 12 vs. Army (Philadelphia, PA)

SMU
Sept. 4 BAYLOR
Sept. 12 NORTH TEXAS
Sept. 19 at TCU
Sept. 26 JAMES MADISON
Oct. 3 EAST CAROLINA
Oct. 8 at Houston
Oct. 24 at South Florida
Oct. 31 TULSA
Nov. 6 TEMPLE
Nov. 14 at Navy
Nov. 21 TULANE
Nov. 28 at Memphis

SOUTH FLORIDA
Sept. 5 FLORIDA A&M
Sept. 12 at Florida State
Sept. 19 at Maryland
Oct. 2 MEMPHIS
Oct. 10 SYRACUSE
Oct. 17 at Connecticut
Oct. 24 SMU
Oct. 31 at Navy
Nov. 7 at East Carolina
Nov. 14 at Temple
Nov. 20 CINCINNATI
Nov. 27 at UCF

TEMPLE
Sept. 5 PENN STATE
Sept. 12 at Cincinnati
Sept. 19 at Massachusetts
Oct. 2 at Charlotte
Oct. 10 TULANE
Oct. 17 UCF
Oct. 22 at East Carolina
Oct. 31 NOTRE DAME
Nov. 6 at SMU
Nov. 14 SOUTH FLORIDA
Nov. 21 MEMPHIS
Nov. 28 CONNECTICUT

TULANE
Sept. 3 DUKE
Sept. 12 at Georgia Tech
Sept. 19 MAINE
Oct. 3 UCF
Oct. 10 at Temple
Oct. 16 HOUSTON
Oct. 24 at Navy
Oct. 31 at Memphis
Nov. 7 CONNECTICUT
Nov. 14 at Army
Nov. 21 at SMU
Nov. 28 TULSA

TULSA
Sept. 5 FAU
Sept. 12 at New Mexico
Sept. 19 at Oklahoma
Oct. 3 HOUSTON
Oct. 10 ULM
Oct. 17 at East Carolina
Oct. 23 MEMPHIS
Oct. 31 at SMU
Nov. 7 UCF
Nov. 14 at Cincinnati
Nov. 21 NAVY
Nov. 28 at Tulane

ACC

BOSTON COLLEGE
Sept. 5 MAINE
Sept. 12 HOWARD
Sept. 18 FLORIDA STATE
Sept. 26 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Oct. 3 at Duke
Oct. 10 WAKE FOREST
Oct. 17 at Clemson
Oct. 24 at Louisville
Oct. 31 VIRGINIA TECH
Nov. 7 NC STATE
Nov. 21 vs. Notre Dame (Fenway Park)
Nov. 28 at Syracuse

CLEMSON
Sept. 5 WOFFORD
Sept. 12 APPALACHIAN STATE
Sept. 17 at Louisville
Oct. 3 NOTRE DAME
Oct. 10 GEORGIA TECH
Oct. 17 BOSTON COLLEGE
Oct. 24 at Miami
Oct. 31 at NC State
Nov. 7 FLORIDA STATE
Nov. 14 at Syracuse
Nov. 21 WAKE FOREST
Nov. 28 at South Carolina

DUKE
Sept. 3 at Tulane
Sept. 12 NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL
Sept. 19 NORTHWESTERN
Sept. 26 GEORGIA TECH
Oct. 3 BOSTON COLLEGE
Oct. 10 at Army
Oct. 24 at Virginia Tech
Oct. 31 MIAMI
Nov. 7 at North Carolina
Nov. 14 PITTSBURGH
Nov. 21 at Virginia
Nov. 28 at Wake Forest

FLORIDA STATE
Sept. 5 TEXAS STATE
Sept. 12 SOUTH FLORIDA
Sept. 18 at Boston College
Oct. 3 at Wake Forest
Oct. 10 MIAMI
Oct. 17 LOUISVILLE
Oct. 24 at Georgia Tech
Oct. 31 SYRACUSE
Nov. 7 at Clemson
Nov. 14 NC STATE
Nov. 21 CHATTANOOGA
Nov. 28 at Florida

GEORGIA TECH
Sept. 3 ALCORN STATE
Sept. 12 TULANE
Sept. 19 at Notre Dame
Sept. 26 at Duke
Oct. 3 NORTH CAROLINA
Oct. 10 at Clemson
Oct. 17 PITTSBURGH
Oct. 24 FLORIDA STATE
Oct. 31 at Virginia
Nov. 12 VIRGINIA TECH
Nov. 21 at Miami
Nov. 28 GEORGIA

LOUISVILLE
Sept. 5 vs. Auburn (Atlanta, GA)
Sept. 12 HOUSTON
Sept. 17 CLEMSON
Sept. 26 SAMFORD
Oct. 3 at NC State
Oct. 17 at Florida State
Oct. 24 BOSTON COLLEGE
Oct. 30 at Wake Forest
Nov. 7 SYRACUSE
Nov. 14 VIRGINIA
Nov. 21 at Pittsburgh
Nov. 28 at Kentucky

MIAMI
Sept. 5 BETHUNE-COOKMAN
Sept. 11 at FAU
Sept. 19 NEBRASKA
Oct. 1 at Cincinnati
Oct. 10 at Florida State
Oct. 17 VIRGINIA TECH
Oct. 24 CLEMSON
Oct. 31 at Duke
Nov. 7 VIRGINIA
Nov. 14 at North Carolina
Nov. 21 GEORGIA TECH
Nov. 27 at Pittsburgh

NORTH CAROLINA
Sept. 3 vs. South Carolina (Charlotte, NC)
Sept. 12 NORTH CAROLINA A&T
Sept. 19 ILLINOIS
Sept. 26 DELAWARE
Oct. 3 at Georgia Tech
Oct. 17 WAKE FOREST
Oct. 24 VIRGINIA
Oct. 29 at Pittsburgh
Nov. 7 DUKE
Nov. 14 MIAMI
Nov. 21 at Virginia Tech
Nov. 28 at NC State

NC STATE
Sept. 5 TROY
Sept. 12 EASTERN KENTUCKY
Sept. 19 at Old Dominion
Sept. 26 at South Alabama
Oct. 3 LOUISVILLE
Oct. 9 at Virginia Tech
Oct. 24 at Wake Forest
Oct. 31 CLEMSON
Nov. 7 at Boston College
Nov. 14 at Florida State
Nov. 21 SYRACUSE
Nov. 28 NORTH CAROLINA

PITTSBURGH
Sept. 5 YOUNGSTOWN STATE
Sept. 12 at Akron
Sept. 19 at Iowa
Oct. 3 at Virginia Tech
Oct. 10 VIRGINIA
Oct. 17 at Georgia Tech
Oct. 24 at Syracuse
Oct. 29 NORTH CAROLINA
Nov. 7 NOTRE DAME
Nov. 14 at Duke
Nov. 21 LOUISVILLE
Nov. 27 MIAMI

SYRACUSE
Sept. 4 RHODE ISLAND
Sept. 12 WAKE FOREST
Sept. 19 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Sept. 26 LSU
Oct. 10 at South Florida
Oct. 17 at Virginia
Oct. 24 PITTSBURGH
Oct. 31 at Florida State
Nov. 7 at Louisville
Nov. 14 CLEMSON
Nov. 21 at NC State
Nov. 28 BOSTON COLLEGE

VIRGINIA
Sept. 5 at UCLA
Sept. 12 NOTRE DAME
Sept. 19 WILLIAM & MARY
Sept. 25 BOISE STATE
Oct. 10 at Pittsburgh
Oct. 17 SYRACUSE
Oct. 24 at North Carolina
Oct. 31 GEORGIA TECH
Nov. 7 at Miami
Nov. 14 at Louisville
Nov. 21 DUKE
Nov. 28 VIRGINIA TECH

VIRGINIA TECH
Sept. 7 OHIO STATE
Sept. 12 FURMAN
Sept. 19 at Purdue
Sept. 26 at East Carolina
Oct. 3 PITTSBURGH
Oct. 9 NC STATE
Oct. 17 at Miami
Oct. 24 DUKE
Oct. 31 at Boston College
Nov. 12 at Georgia Tech
Nov. 21 NORTH CAROLINA
Nov. 28 at Virginia

WAKE FOREST
Sept. 3 ELON
Sept. 12 at Syracuse
Sept. 19 at Army
Sept. 26 INDIANA
Oct. 3 FLORIDA STATE
Oct. 10 at Boston College
Oct. 17 at North Carolina
Oct. 24 NC STATE
Oct. 30 LOUISVILLE
Nov. 14 at Notre Dame
Nov. 21 at Clemson
Nov. 28 DUKE

BIG TEN

ILLINOIS
Sept. 4 KENT STATE
Sept. 12 WESTERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 19 at North Carolina
Sept. 26 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Oct. 3 NEBRASKA
Oct. 10 at Iowa
Oct. 24 WISCONSIN
Oct. 31 at Penn State
Nov. 7 at Purdue
Nov. 14 OHIO STATE
Nov. 21 at Minnesota
Nov. 28 vs. Northwestern (Chicago, IL)

INDIANA
Sept. 5 SOUTHERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 12 FIU
Sept. 19 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Sept. 26 at Wake Forest
Oct. 3 OHIO STATE
Oct. 10 at Penn State
Oct. 17 RUTGERS
Oct. 24 at Michigan State
Nov. 7 IOWA
Nov. 14 MICHIGAN
Nov. 21 at Maryland
Nov. 28 at Purdue

IOWA
Sept. 5 ILLINOIS STATE
Sept. 12 at Iowa State
Sept. 19 PITTSBURGH
Sept. 26 NORTH TEXAS
Oct. 3 at Wisconsin
Oct. 10 ILLINOIS
Oct. 17 at Northwestern
Oct. 31 MARYLAND
Nov. 7 at Indiana
Nov. 14 MINNESOTA
Nov. 21 PURDUE
Nov. 27 at Nebraska

MARYLAND
Sept. 5 RICHMOND
Sept. 12 BOWLING GREEN
Sept. 19 SOUTH FLORIDA
Sept. 26 at West Virginia
Oct. 3 MICHIGAN
Oct. 10 at Ohio State
Oct. 24 vs. Penn State (Baltimore, MD)
Oct. 31 at Iowa
Nov. 7 WISCONSIN
Nov. 14 at Michigan State
Nov. 21 INDIANA
Nov. 28 at Rutgers

MICHIGAN
Sept. 3 at Utah
Sept. 12 OREGON STATE
Sept. 19 UNLV
Sept. 26 BYU
Oct. 3 at Maryland
Oct. 10 NORTHWESTERN
Oct. 17 MICHIGAN STATE
Oct. 31 at Minnesota
Nov. 7 RUTGERS
Nov. 14 at Indiana
Nov. 21 at Penn State
Nov. 28 OHIO STATE

MICHIGAN STATE
Sept. 4 at Western Michigan
Sept. 12 OREGON
Sept. 19 AIR FORCE
Sept. 26 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Oct. 3 PURDUE
Oct. 10 at Rutgers
Oct. 17 at Michigan
Oct. 24 INDIANA
Nov. 7 at Nebraska
Nov. 14 MARYLAND
Nov. 21 at Ohio State
Nov. 28 PENN STATE

MINNESOTA
Sept. 3 TCU
Sept. 12 at Colorado State
Sept. 19 KENT STATE
Sept. 26 OHIO
Oct. 3 at Northwestern
Oct. 10 at Purdue
Oct. 17 NEBRASKA
Oct. 31 MICHIGAN
Nov. 7 at Ohio State
Nov. 14 at Iowa
Nov. 21 ILLINOIS
Nov. 28 WISCONSIN

NEBRASKA
Sept. 5 BYU
Sept. 12 SOUTH ALABAMA
Sept. 19 at Miami
Sept. 26 SOUTHERN MISS
Oct. 3 at Illinois
Oct. 10 WISCONSIN
Oct. 17 at Minnesota
Oct. 24 NORTHWESTERN
Oct. 31 at Purdue
Nov. 7 MICHIGAN STATE
Nov. 14 at Rutgers
Nov. 27 IOWA

NORTHWESTERN
Sept. 5 STANFORD
Sept. 12 EASTERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 19 at Duke
Sept. 26 BALL STATE
Oct. 3 MINNESOTA
Oct. 10 at Michigan
Oct. 17 IOWA
Oct. 24 at Nebraska
Nov. 7 PENN STATE
Nov. 14 PURDUE
Nov. 21 at Wisconsin
Nov. 28 vs. Illinois (Chicago, IL)

OHIO STATE
Sept. 7 at Virginia Tech
Sept. 12 HAWAII
Sept. 19 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 26 WESTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 3 at Indiana
Oct. 10 MARYLAND
Oct. 17 PENN STATE
Oct. 24 at Rutgers
Nov. 7 MINNESOTA
Nov. 14 at Illinois
Nov. 21 MICHIGAN STATE
Nov. 28 at Michigan

PENN STATE
Sept. 5 at Temple
Sept. 12 BUFFALO
Sept. 19 RUTGERS
Sept. 26 SAN DIEGO STATE
Oct. 3 ARMY
Oct. 10 INDIANA
Oct. 17 at Ohio State
Oct. 24 vs. Maryland (Baltimore, MD)
Oct. 31 ILLINOIS
Nov. 7 at Northwestern
Nov. 21 MICHIGAN
Nov. 28 at Michigan State

PURDUE
Sept. 6 at Marshall
Sept. 12 INDIANA STATE
Sept. 19 VIRGINIA TECH
Sept. 26 BOWLING GREEN
Oct. 3 at Michigan State
Oct. 10 MINNESOTA
Oct. 17 at Wisconsin
Oct. 31 NEBRASKA
Nov. 7 ILLINOIS
Nov. 14 at Northwestern
Nov. 21 at Iowa
Nov. 28 INDIANA

RUTGERS
Sept. 5 NORFOLK STATE
Sept. 12 WASHINGTON STATE
Sept. 19 at Penn State
Sept. 26 KANSAS
Oct. 10 MICHIGAN STATE
Oct. 17 at Indiana
Oct. 24 OHIO STATE
Oct. 31 at Wisconsin
Nov. 7 at Michigan
Nov. 14 NEBRASKA
Nov. 21 at Army
Nov. 28 MARYLAND

WISCONSIN
Sept. 5 vs. Alabama (Dallas, TX)
Sept. 12 MIAMI (OH)
Sept. 19 TROY
Sept. 26 HAWAII
Oct. 3 IOWA
Oct. 10 at Nebraska
Oct. 17 PURDUE
Oct. 24 at Illinois
Oct. 31 RUTGERS
Nov. 7 at Maryland
Nov. 21 NORTHWESTERN
Nov. 28 at Minnesota

BIG 12

BAYLOR
Sept. 4 at SMU
Sept. 12 LAMAR
Sept. 26 RICE
Oct. 3 vs. Texas Tech (Arlington, TX)
Oct. 10 at Kansas
Oct. 17 WEST VIRGINIA
Oct. 24 IOWA STATE
Nov. 5 at Kansas State
Nov. 14 OKLAHOMA
Nov. 21 at Oklahoma State
Nov. 27 at TCU
Dec 5 TEXAS

IOWA STATE
Sept. 5 NORTHERN IOWA
Sept. 12 IOWA
Sept. 19 at Toledo
Oct. 3 KANSAS
Oct. 10 at Texas Tech
Oct. 17 TCU
Oct. 24 at Baylor
Oct. 31 TEXAS
Nov. 7 at Oklahoma
Nov. 14 OKLAHOMA STATE
Nov. 21 at Kansas State
Nov. 28 at West Virginia

KANSAS
Sept. 5 SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
Sept. 12 MEMPHIS
Sept. 26 at Rutgers

Wrangler

NATIONAL SCHEDULES

Oct. 3 at Iowa State
Oct. 10 BAYLOR
Oct. 17 TEXAS TECH
Oct. 24 at Oklahoma State
Oct. 31 OKLAHOMA
Nov. 7 at Texas
Nov. 14 at TCU
Nov. 21 WEST VIRGINIA
Nov. 28 KANSAS STATE

KANSAS STATE

Sept. 5 SOUTH DAKOTA
Sept. 12 at UTSA
Sept. 19 LOUISIANA TECH
Oct. 3 at Oklahoma State
Oct. 10 TCU
Oct. 17 OKLAHOMA
Oct. 24 at Texas
Nov. 5 BAYLOR
Nov. 14 at Texas Tech
Nov. 21 IOWA STATE
Nov. 28 at Kansas
Dec. 5 WEST VIRGINIA

OKLAHOMA

Sept. 5 AKRON
Sept. 12 at Tennessee
Sept. 19 TULSA
Oct. 3 WEST VIRGINIA
Oct. 10 vs. Texas (Dallas, TX)
Oct. 17 at Kansas State
Oct. 24 TEXAS TECH
Oct. 31 at Kansas
Nov. 7 IOWA STATE
Nov. 14 at Baylor
Nov. 21 TCU
Nov. 28 at Oklahoma State

OKLAHOMA STATE

Sept. 3 at Central Michigan
Sept. 12 CENTRAL ARKANSAS
Sept. 19 UTSA
Sept. 26 at Texas
Oct. 3 KANSAS STATE
Oct. 10 at West Virginia
Oct. 24 KANSAS
Oct. 31 at Texas Tech
Nov. 7 TCU
Nov. 14 at Iowa State
Nov. 21 BAYLOR
Nov. 28 OKLAHOMA

TCU

Sept. 3 at Minnesota
Sept. 12 STEPHEN F. AUSTIN
Sept. 19 SMU
Sept. 26 at Texas Tech
Oct. 3 TEXAS
Oct. 10 at Kansas State
Oct. 17 at Iowa State
Oct. 29 WEST VIRGINIA
Nov. 7 at Oklahoma State
Nov. 14 KANSAS
Nov. 21 at Oklahoma
Nov. 27 BAYLOR

TEXAS

Sept. 5 at Notre Dame
Sept. 12 RICE
Sept. 19 CALIFORNIA
Sept. 26 OKLAHOMA STATE
Oct. 3 at TCU
Oct. 10 vs. Oklahoma (Dallas, TX)
Oct. 24 KANSAS STATE
Oct. 31 at Iowa State
Nov. 7 KANSAS
Nov. 14 at West Virginia
Nov. 26 TEXAS TECH
Dec 5 at Baylor

TEXAS TECH

Sept. 5 SAM HOUSTON STATE
Sept. 12 UTEP
Sept. 19 at Arkansas
Sept. 26 TCU
Oct. 3 vs. Baylor (Arlington, TX)
Oct. 10 IOWA STATE
Oct. 17 at Kansas
Oct. 24 at Oklahoma
Oct. 31 OKLAHOMA STATE
Nov. 7 at West Virginia
Nov. 14 KANSAS STATE
Nov. 26 at Texas

WEST VIRGINIA

Sept. 5 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Sept. 12 LIBERTY
Sept. 26 MARYLAND
Oct. 3 at Oklahoma
Oct. 10 OKLAHOMA STATE
Oct. 17 at Baylor
Oct. 29 at TCU
Nov. 7 TEXAS TECH
Nov. 14 TEXAS
Nov. 21 at Kansas
Nov. 28 IOWA STATE
Dec 5 at Kansas State

C-USA

CHARLOTE

Sept. 4 at Georgia State
Sept. 12 PRESBYTERIAN
Sept. 19 at Middle Tennessee
Sept. 26 FAU
Oct. 2 TEMPLE
Oct. 17 at Old Dominion
Oct. 24 SOUTHERN MISS
Oct. 31 MARSHALL
Nov. 7 at FIU
Nov. 14 UTSA
Nov. 21 at Kentucky
Nov. 28 at Rice

FLORIDA ATLANTIC (FAU)

Sept. 5 at Tulsa
Sept. 11 MIAMI
Sept. 19 BUFFALO
Sept. 26 at Charlotte
Oct. 10 RICE
Oct. 17 MARSHALL
Oct. 24 at UTEP
Oct. 31 FIU
Nov. 7 at Western Kentucky
Nov. 14 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Nov. 21 at Florida
Nov. 28 at Old Dominion

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL (FIU)

Sept. 3 at UCF
Sept. 12 at Indiana
Sept. 19 NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL
Sept. 26 at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 3 at Massachusetts
Oct. 10 UTEP
Oct. 17 at Middle Tennessee
Oct. 24 OLD DOMINION
Oct. 31 at FAU
Nov. 7 CHARLOTTE
Nov. 14 at Marshall
Nov. 21 WESTERN KENTUCKY

LOUISIANA TECH

Sept. 5 SOUTHERN
Sept. 10 at Western Kentucky
Sept. 19 at Kansas State
Sept. 26 FIU
Oct. 3 LOUISIANA
Oct. 10 at UTSA
Oct. 17 at Mississippi State
Oct. 24 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Oct. 30 at Rice
Nov. 7 NORTH TEXAS
Nov. 21 at UTEP
Nov. 28 SOUTHERN MISS

MARSHALL

Sept. 6 PURDUE
Sept. 12 at Ohio
Sept. 19 NORFOLK STATE
Sept. 26 at Kent State
Oct. 3 OLD DOMINION
Oct. 9 SOUTHERN MISS
Oct. 17 at FAU
Oct. 24 NORTH TEXAS
Oct. 31 at Charlotte
Nov. 7 at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 14 FIU
Nov. 27 at Western Kentucky

MIDDLE TENNESSEE

Sept. 5 JACKSON STATE
Sept. 12 at Alabama
Sept. 19 CHARLOTTE
Sept. 26 at Illinois
Oct. 3 VANDERBILT
Oct. 10 at Western Kentucky
Oct. 17 FIU
Oct. 24 at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 7 MARSHALL
Nov. 14 at FAU
Nov. 21 NORTH TEXAS
Nov. 28 at UTSA

NORTH TEXAS

Sept. 12 at SMU
Sept. 19 RICE
Sept. 26 at Iowa
Oct. 3 at Southern Miss
Oct. 10 PORTLAND STATE
Oct. 15 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Oct. 24 at Marshall
Oct. 31 UTSA
Nov. 7 at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 14 at Tennessee
Nov. 21 at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 28 UTEP

OLD DOMINION

Sept. 5 at Eastern Michigan
Sept. 12 NORFOLK STATE
Sept. 19 NC STATE
Sept. 26 APPALACHIAN STATE
Oct. 3 at Marshall
Oct. 17 CHARLOTTE
Oct. 24 at FIU
Oct. 31 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Nov. 7 at UTSA
Nov. 14 UTEP
Nov. 21 at Southern Miss
Nov. 28 FAU

RICE

Sept. 5 WAGNER
Sept. 12 at Texas
Sept. 19 at North Texas
Sept. 26 at Baylor
Oct. 3 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Oct. 10 at FAU
Oct. 24 ARMY
Oct. 30 LOUISIANA TECH
Nov. 6 at UTEP
Nov. 14 SOUTHERN MISS
Nov. 21 at UTSA
Nov. 28 CHARLOTTE

SOUTHERN MISS

Sept. 5 MISSISSIPPI STATE
Sept. 12 AUSTIN PEAY
Sept. 19 at Texas State
Sept. 26 at Nebraska
Oct. 3 NORTH TEXAS
Oct. 9 at Marshall
Oct. 17 UTSA
Oct. 24 at Charlotte
Oct. 31 UTEP
Nov. 14 at Rice
Nov. 21 OLD DOMINION
Nov. 28 at Louisiana Tech

UTEP

Sept. 5 at Arkansas
Sept. 12 at Texas Tech
Sept. 19 at New Mexico State
Sept. 26 INCARNATE WORD
Oct. 3 UTSA
Oct. 10 at FIU
Oct. 24 FAU
Oct. 31 at Southern Miss
Nov. 6 RICE
Nov. 14 at Old Dominion
Nov. 21 LOUISIANA TECH
Nov. 28 at North Texas

UTSA

Sept. 3 at Arizona
Sept. 12 KANSAS STATE
Sept. 19 at Oklahoma State
Sept. 26 COLORADO STATE
Oct. 3 at UTEP
Oct. 10 LOUISIANA TECH
Oct. 17 at Southern Miss
Oct. 31 at North Texas
Nov. 7 OLD DOMINION
Nov. 14 at Charlotte
Nov. 21 RICE
Nov. 28 MIDDLE TENNESSEE

WESTERN KENTUCKY

Sept. 5 at Vanderbilt
Sept. 10 LOUISIANA TECH
Sept. 19 at Indiana
Sept. 26 MIAMI (OH)
Oct. 3 at Rice
Oct. 10 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Oct. 15 at North Texas
Oct. 24 at LSU
Oct. 31 at Old Dominion
Nov. 7 FAU
Nov. 21 at FIU
Nov. 27 MARSHALL

I-A INDEPENDENTS

ARMY

Sept. 4 FORDHAM
Sept. 12 at Connecticut
Sept. 19 WAKE FOREST
Sept. 26 at Eastern Michigan
Oct. 3 at Penn State
Oct. 10 DUKE
Oct. 17 BUCKNELL
Oct. 24 at Rice
Nov. 7 at Air Force
Nov. 14 TULANE
Nov. 21 RUTGERS
Dec 12 vs. Navy (Philadelphia, PA)

BYU

Sept. 5 at Nebraska
Sept. 12 BOISE STATE
Sept. 19 at UCLA
Sept. 26 at Michigan
Oct. 2 CONNECTICUT
Oct. 10 EAST CAROLINA
Oct. 17 CINCINNATI
Nov. 6 at San Jose State
Nov. 14 vs. Missouri (Kansas City, MO)
Nov. 21 FRESNO STATE
Nov. 28 at Utah State

NOTRE DAME

Sept. 5 TEXAS
Sept. 12 at Virginia
Sept. 19 GEORGIA TECH
Sept. 26 MASSACHUSETTS
Oct. 3 at Clemson
Oct. 10 NAVY
Oct. 17 USC
Oct. 31 at Temple
Nov. 7 at Pittsburgh
Nov. 14 WAKE FOREST
Nov. 21 at Boston College (Fenway Park)
Nov. 28 at Stanford

MAC

AKRON

Sept. 5 at Oklahoma
Sept. 12 PITTSBURGH
Sept. 19 SAVANNAH STATE
Sept. 26 at Louisiana
Oct. 3 OHIO
Oct. 10 at Eastern Michigan
Oct. 17 at Bowling Green
Oct. 31 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Nov. 7 at Massachusetts
Nov. 14 at Miami (OH)
Nov. 21 BUFFALO
Nov. 27 KENT STATE

BALL STATE

Sept. 3 VMI
Sept. 12 at Texas A&M
Sept. 19 at Eastern Michigan
Sept. 26 at Northwestern
Oct. 3 TOLEDO
Oct. 10 at Northern Illinois
Oct. 17 GEORGIA STATE
Oct. 24 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Oct. 31 MASSACHUSETTS
Nov. 5 at Western Michigan
Nov. 17 at Ohio
Nov. 24 BOWLING GREEN

BOWLING GREEN

Sept. 5 vs. Tennessee (Nashville, TN)
Sept. 12 at Maryland
Sept. 19 MEMPHIS
Sept. 26 at Purdue
Oct. 3 at Buffalo
Oct. 10 MASSACHUSETTS
Oct. 17 AKRON
Oct. 24 at Kent State
Nov. 4 OHIO
Nov. 11 at Western Michigan
Nov. 17 TOLEDO
Nov. 24 at Ball State

BUFFALO

Sept. 5 ALBANY
Sept. 12 at Penn State
Sept. 19 at FAU
Sept. 26 NEVADA
Oct. 3 BOWLING GREEN
Oct. 17 at Central Michigan
Oct. 24 OHIO
Oct. 29 at Miami (OH)
Nov. 5 at Kent State
Nov. 11 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Nov. 21 at Akron
Nov. 27 MASSACHUSETTS

CENTRAL MICHIGAN

Sept. 3 OKLAHOMA STATE
Sept. 12 MONMOUTH (NJ)
Sept. 19 at Syracuse
Sept. 26 at Michigan State
Oct. 3 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Oct. 10 at Western Michigan
Oct. 17 BUFFALO
Oct. 24 at Ball State
Oct. 31 at Akron
Nov. 10 TOLEDO
Nov. 18 at Kent State
Nov. 27 Eastern MICHIGAN

EASTERN MICHIGAN

Sept. 5 OLD DOMINION
Sept. 12 at Wyoming
Sept. 19 BALL STATE
Sept. 26 ARMY
Oct. 3 at LSU
Oct. 10 AKRON
Oct. 17 at Toledo
Oct. 24 at Northern Illinois
Oct. 29 W. MICHIGAN
Nov. 7 at Miami (OH)
Nov. 14 MASSACHUSETTS
Nov. 27 at Central Michigan

KENT STATE

Sept. 4 at Illinois
Sept. 12 DELAWARE STATE
Sept. 19 at Minnesota
Sept. 26 MARSHALL
Oct. 3 MIAMI (OH)
Oct. 10 at Toledo
Oct. 17 at Massachusetts
Oct. 24 BOWLING GREEN
Nov. 5 BUFFALO
Nov. 10 at Ohio
Nov. 18 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Nov. 27 at Akron

MASSACHUSETTS

Sept. 12 at Colorado
Sept. 19 TEMPLE
Sept. 26 at Notre Dame
Oct. 3 FIU
Oct. 10 at Bowling Green
Oct. 17 KENT STATE
Oct. 24 TOLEDO
Oct. 31 at Ball State
Nov. 7 AKRON
Nov. 14 at Eastern Michigan
Nov. 21 MIAMI (OH)
Nov. 27 at Buffalo

MIAMI (OH)

Sept. 5 PRESBYTERIAN
Sept. 12 at Wisconsin
Sept. 19 CINCINNATI
Sept. 26 at Western Kentucky
Oct. 3 at Kent State
Oct. 10 at Ohio
Oct. 17 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Oct. 24 at Western Michigan
Oct. 29 BUFFALO
Nov. 7 EASTERN MICHIGAN
Nov. 14 AKRON
Nov. 21 at Massachusetts

NORTHERN ILLINOIS

Sept. 5 UNLV
Sept. 12 MURRAY STATE
Sept. 19 at Ohio State
Sept. 26 at Boston College
Oct. 3 at Central Michigan
Oct. 10 BALL STATE
Oct. 17 at Miami (OH)
Oct. 24 EASTERN MICHIGAN
Nov. 3 at Toledo
Nov. 11 at Buffalo
Nov. 18 WESTERN MICHIGAN
Nov. 24 OHIO

OHIO

Sept. 3 at Idaho
Sept. 12 MARSHALL
Sept. 19 S.E. LOUISIANA
Sept. 26 at Minnesota
Oct. 3 at Akron
Oct. 10 MIAMI (OH)
Oct. 17 WESTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 24 at Buffalo
Nov. 4 at Bowling Green
Nov. 10 KENT STATE
Nov. 17 BALL STATE
Nov. 24 at Northern Illinois

TOLEDO

Sept. 3 STONY BROOK
Sept. 12 at Arkansas
Sept. 19 IOWA STATE
Sept. 26 ARKANSAS STATE
Oct. 3 at Ball State
Oct. 10 KENT STATE
Oct. 17 EASTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 24 at Massachusetts
Nov. 3 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Nov. 10 at Central Michigan
Nov. 17 at Bowling Green
Nov. 27 WESTERN MICHIGAN

WESTERN MICHIGAN

Sept. 4 MICHIGAN STATE
Sept. 12 at Georgia Southern
Sept. 19 MURRAY STATE
Sept. 26 at Ohio State
Oct. 10 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Oct. 17 at Ohio
Oct. 24 MIAMI (OH)
Oct. 29 at Eastern Michigan
Nov. 5 BALL STATE
Nov. 11 BOWLING GREEN
Nov. 18 at Northern Illinois
Nov. 27 at Toledo

MOUNTAIN WEST

AIR FORCE

Sept. 5 MORGAN STATE
Sept. 12 SAN JOSE STATE
Sept. 19 at Michigan State
Oct. 3 at Navy
Oct. 10 WYOMING
Oct. 17 at Colorado State
Oct. 24 FRESNO STATE
Oct. 31 at Hawaii
Nov. 7 ARMY
Nov. 14 UTAH STATE
Nov. 20 at Boise State
Nov. 28 at New Mexico

BOISE STATE

Sept. 4 WASHINGTON
Sept. 12 at BYU
Sept. 18 IDAHO STATE
Sept. 25 at Virginia
Oct. 3 HAWAII
Oct. 10 at Colorado State
Oct. 16 at Utah State
Oct. 24 WYOMING
Oct. 31 at UNLV
Nov. 14 NEW MEXICO
Nov. 20 AIR FORCE
Nov. 27 at San Jose State

COLORADO STATE

Sept. 5 SAVANNAH STATE
Sept. 12 MINNESOTA
Sept. 19 vs. Colorado (Denver, CO)
Sept. 26 at UTSA
Oct. 3 at Utah State
Oct. 10 BOISE STATE
Oct. 17 AIR FORCE
Oct. 31 SAN DIEGO STATE
Nov. 7 at Wyoming
Nov. 14 UNLV
Nov. 21 at New Mexico
Nov. 28 at Fresno State

FRESNO STATE

Sept. 3 ABILENE CHRISTIAN
Sept. 12 at Ole Miss
Sept. 19 UTAH
Sept. 26 at San Jose State
Oct. 3 at San Diego State
Oct. 10 UTAH STATE
Oct. 17 UNLV
Oct. 24 at Air Force
Nov. 5 NEVADA
Nov. 14 at Hawaii
Nov. 21 at BYU
Nov. 28 COLORADO STATE

HAWAII

Sept. 3 COLORADO
Sept. 12 at Ohio State
Sept. 19 UC DAVIS
Sept. 26 at Wisconsin
Oct. 3 at Boise State
Oct. 10 SAN DIEGO STATE
Oct. 17 at New Mexico
Oct. 24 at Nevada
Oct. 31 AIR FORCE
Nov. 7 at UNLV
Nov. 14 FRESNO STATE
Nov. 21 SAN JOSE STATE
Nov. 28 ULM

NEVADA

Sept. 3 UC DAVIS
Sept. 12 ARIZONA
Sept. 19 at Texas A&M
Sept. 26 at Buffalo
Oct. 3 UNLV
Oct. 10 NEW MEXICO
Oct. 17 at Wyoming
Oct. 24 HAWAII
Nov. 5 at Fresno State
Nov. 14 SAN JOSE STATE
Nov. 21 at Utah State
Nov. 28 at San Diego State

NEW MEXICO

Sept. 5 MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE
Sept. 12 TULSA
Sept. 18 at Arizona State

Wrangler

NATIONAL SCHEDULES

Sept. 26 at Wyoming
Oct. 3 NEW MEXICO STATE
Oct. 10 at Nevada
Oct. 17 HAWAII
Oct. 24 at San Jose State
Nov. 7 UTAH STATE
Nov. 14 at Boise State
Nov. 21 COLORADO STATE
Nov. 28 AIR FORCE

SAN DIEGO STATE

Sept. 5 SAN DIEGO
Sept. 12 at California
Sept. 19 SOUTH ALABAMA
Sept. 26 at Penn State
Oct. 3 FRESNO STATE
Oct. 10 at Hawaii
Oct. 17 at San Jose State
Oct. 23 UTAH STATE
Oct. 31 at Colorado State
Nov. 14 WYOMING
Nov. 21 at UNLV
Nov. 28 NEVADA

SAN JOSE STATE

Sept. 3 NEW HAMPSHIRE
Sept. 12 at Air Force
Sept. 19 at Oregon State
Sept. 26 FRESNO STATE
Oct. 3 at Auburn
Oct. 10 at UNLV
Oct. 17 SAN DIEGO STATE
Oct. 24 NEW MEXICO
Nov. 6 BYU
Nov. 14 at Nevada
Nov. 21 at Hawaii
Nov. 27 BOISE STATE

UNLV

Sept. 5 at Northern Illinois
Sept. 12 UCLA
Sept. 19 at Michigan
Sept. 26 IDAHO STATE
Oct. 3 at Nevada
Oct. 10 SAN JOSE STATE
Oct. 17 at Fresno State
Oct. 31 BOISE STATE
Nov. 7 HAWAII
Nov. 14 at Colorado State
Nov. 21 SAN DIEGO STATE
Nov. 28 at Wyoming

UTAH STATE

Sept. 3 SOUTHERN UTAH
Sept. 11 at Utah
Sept. 19 at Washington
Oct. 3 COLORADO STATE
Oct. 10 at Fresno State
Oct. 16 BOISE STATE
Oct. 23 at San Diego State
Oct. 30 WYOMING
Nov. 7 at New Mexico
Nov. 14 at Air Force
Nov. 21 NEVADA
Nov. 28 BYU

WYOMING

Sept. 5 NORTH DAKOTA
Sept. 12 EASTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 19 at Washington State
Sept. 26 NEW MEXICO
Oct. 3 at Appalachian State
Oct. 10 at Air Force
Oct. 17 NEVADA
Oct. 24 at Boise State
Oct. 30 at Utah State
Nov. 7 COLORADO STATE
Nov. 14 at San Diego State
Nov. 28 UNLV

PAC-12

ARIZONA

Sept. 3 UTSA
Sept. 12 at Nevada
Sept. 19 NORTHERN ARIZONA
Sept. 26 UCLA
Oct. 3 at Stanford
Oct. 10 OREGON STATE
Oct. 17 at Colorado
Oct. 24 WASHINGTON STATE
Oct. 31 at Washington
Nov. 7 at USC
Nov. 14 UTAH
Nov. 21 at Arizona State

ARIZONA STATE

Sept. 5 vs. Texas A&M (Houston, TX)
Sept. 12 CAL POLY
Sept. 18 NEW MEXICO
Sept. 26 USC
Oct. 3 at UCLA
Oct. 10 COLORADO
Oct. 17 at Utah
Oct. 29 OREGON
Nov. 7 at Washington State
Nov. 14 WASHINGTON
Nov. 21 ARIZONA
Nov. 28 at California

CALIFORNIA

Sept. 5 GRAMBLING STATE
Sept. 12 SAN DIEGO STATE
Sept. 19 at Texas
Sept. 26 at Washington
Oct. 3 WASHINGTON STATE
Oct. 10 at Utah
Oct. 22 at UCLA
Oct. 31 USC
Nov. 7 at Oregon
Nov. 14 OREGON STATE
Nov. 21 at Stanford
Nov. 28 ARIZONA STATE

COLORADO

Sept. 3 at Hawaii
Sept. 12 MASSACHUSETTS
Sept. 19 vs. Colorado State (Denver, CO)
Sept. 26 NICHOLLS STATE
Oct. 3 OREGON
Oct. 10 at Arizona State
Oct. 17 ARIZONA
Oct. 24 at Oregon State
Oct. 31 at UCLA
Nov. 7 STANFORD
Nov. 13 USC
Nov. 21 at Washington State
Nov. 28 at Utah

OREGON

Sept. 5 EASTERN WASHINGTON
Sept. 12 at Michigan State
Sept. 19 GEORGIA STATE
Sept. 26 UTAH
Oct. 3 at Colorado
Oct. 10 WASHINGTON STATE
Oct. 17 at Washington
Oct. 29 at Arizona State
Nov. 7 CALIFORNIA
Nov. 14 at Stanford
Nov. 21 USC
Nov. 27 OREGON STATE

OREGON STATE

Sept. 4 WEBER STATE
Sept. 12 at Michigan
Sept. 19 SAN JOSE STATE
Sept. 25 STANFORD
Oct. 10 at Arizona
Oct. 17 at Washington State
Oct. 24 COLORADO
Oct. 31 at Utah
Nov. 7 UCLA
Nov. 14 at California
Nov. 21 WASHINGTON
Nov. 27 at Oregon

STANFORD

Sept. 5 at Northwestern
Sept. 12 UCF
Sept. 19 at USC
Sept. 25 at Oregon State
Oct. 3 ARIZONA
Oct. 15 UCLA
Oct. 24 WASHINGTON
Oct. 31 at Washington State
Nov. 7 at Colorado
Nov. 14 OREGON
Nov. 21 CALIFORNIA
Nov. 28 NOTRE DAME

UCLA

Sept. 5 VIRGINIA
Sept. 12 at UNLV
Sept. 19 BYU
Sept. 26 at Arizona
Oct. 3 ARIZONA STATE
Oct. 15 at Stanford
Oct. 22 CALIFORNIA
Oct. 31 COLORADO
Nov. 7 at Oregon State
Nov. 14 WASHINGTON STATE
Nov. 21 at Utah
Nov. 28 at USC

USC

Sept. 5 ARKANSAS STATE
Sept. 12 IDAHO
Sept. 19 STANFORD
Sept. 26 at Arizona State
Oct. 8 WASHINGTON
Oct. 17 at Notre Dame
Oct. 24 UTAH
Oct. 31 at California
Nov. 7 ARIZONA
Nov. 13 at Colorado
Nov. 21 at Oregon
Nov. 28 UCLA

UTAH

Sept. 3 MICHIGAN
Sept. 11 UTAH STATE
Sept. 19 at Fresno State
Sept. 26 at Oregon
Oct. 10 CALIFORNIA
Oct. 17 ARIZONA STATE
Oct. 24 at USC
Oct. 31 OREGON STATE
Nov. 7 at Washington
Nov. 14 at Arizona
Nov. 21 UCLA
Nov. 28 COLORADO

WASHINGTON

Sept. 4 at Boise State
Sept. 12 SACRAMENTO STATE
Sept. 19 UTAH STATE
Sept. 26 CALIFORNIA
Oct. 8 at USC
Oct. 17 OREGON
Oct. 24 at Stanford
Oct. 31 ARIZONA
Nov. 7 UTAH
Nov. 14 at Arizona State
Nov. 21 at Oregon State
Nov. 27 WASHINGTON STATE

WASHINGTON STATE

Sept. 5 PORTLAND STATE
Sept. 12 at Rutgers
Sept. 19 WYOMING
Oct. 3 at California
Oct. 10 at Oregon
Oct. 17 OREGON STATE
Oct. 24 at Arizona
Oct. 31 STANFORD
Nov. 7 ARIZONA STATE
Nov. 14 at UCLA
Nov. 21 COLORADO
Nov. 27 at Washington

SEC

ALABAMA

Sept. 5 vs. Wisconsin (Dallas, TX)
Sept. 12 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Sept. 19 OLE MISS
Sept. 26 ULM
Oct. 3 at Georgia
Oct. 10 ARKANSAS
Oct. 17 at Texas A&M
Oct. 24 TENNESSEE
Nov. 7 LSU
Nov. 14 at Mississippi State
Nov. 21 CHARLESTON SOUTHERN
Nov. 28 at Auburn

ARKANSAS

Sept. 5 UTEP
Sept. 12 TOLEDO
Sept. 19 TEXAS TECH
Sept. 26 vs. TEXAS A&M (Arlington, TX)
Oct. 3 at Tennessee
Oct. 10 at Alabama
Oct. 24 AUBURN
Oct. 31 UT-MARTIN
Nov. 7 at Ole Miss
Nov. 14 at LSU
Nov. 21 MISSISSIPPI STATE
Nov. 28 MISSOURI

AUBURN

Sept. 5 vs. Louisville (Atlanta, GA)
Sept. 12 JACKSONVILLE STATE
Sept. 19 at LSU
Sept. 26 MISSISSIPPI STATE
Oct. 3 SAN JOSE STATE
Oct. 15 at Kentucky
Oct. 24 at Arkansas
Oct. 31 OLE MISS
Nov. 7 at Texas A&M
Nov. 14 GEORGIA
Nov. 21 IDAHO
Nov. 28 ALABAMA

FLORIDA

Sept. 5 NEW MEXICO STATE
Sept. 12 EAST CAROLINA
Sept. 19 at Kentucky
Sept. 26 TENNESSEE
Oct. 3 OLE MISS
Oct. 10 at Missouri
Oct. 17 at LSU
Oct. 31 vs. Georgia (Jacksonville, FL)
Nov. 7 VANDERBILT
Nov. 14 at South Carolina
Nov. 21 FAU
Nov. 28 FLORIDA STATE

GEORGIA

Sept. 5 ULM
Sept. 12 at Vanderbilt
Sept. 19 SOUTH CAROLINA
Sept. 26 SOUTHERN
Oct. 3 ALABAMA
Oct. 10 at Tennessee
Oct. 17 MISSOURI
Oct. 31 vs. Florida (Jacksonville, FL)
Nov. 7 KENTUCKY
Nov. 14 at Auburn
Nov. 21 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Nov. 28 at Georgia Tech

KENTUCKY

Sept. 5 LOUISIANA
Sept. 12 at South Carolina
Sept. 19 FLORIDA
Sept. 26 MISSOURI
Oct. 3 EASTERN KENTUCKY
Oct. 15 AUBURN
Oct. 24 at Mississippi State
Oct. 31 TENNESSEE
Nov. 7 at Georgia
Nov. 14 at Vanderbilt
Nov. 21 CHARLOTTE
Nov. 28 LOUISVILLE

LSU

Sept. 5 McNEESE STATE
Sept. 12 at Mississippi State
Sept. 19 AUBURN
Sept. 26 at Syracuse
Oct. 3 EASTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 10 at South Carolina
Oct. 17 FLORIDA
Oct. 24 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Nov. 7 at Alabama
Nov. 14 ARKANSAS
Nov. 21 at Ole Miss
Nov. 28 TEXAS A&M

OLE MISS

Sept. 5 UT-MARTIN
Sept. 12 FRESNO STATE
Sept. 19 at Alabama
Sept. 26 VANDERBILT
Oct. 3 at Florida
Oct. 10 NEW MEXICO STATE
Oct. 17 at Memphis
Oct. 24 TEXAS A&M
Oct. 31 at Auburn
Nov. 7 ARKANSAS
Nov. 21 LSU
Nov. 28 at Mississippi State

MISSISSIPPI STATE

Sept. 5 at Southern Miss
Sept. 12 LSU
Sept. 19 NORTHWESTERN STATE
Sept. 26 at Auburn
Oct. 3 at Texas A&M
Oct. 10 TROY
Oct. 17 LOUISIANA TECH
Oct. 24 KENTUCKY
Nov. 5 at Missouri
Nov. 14 ALABAMA
Nov. 21 at Arkansas
Nov. 28 OLE MISS

MISSOURI

Sept. 5 SE MISSOURI STATE
Sept. 12 at Arkansas State
Sept. 19 CONNECTICUT
Sept. 26 at Kentucky
Oct. 3 SOUTH CAROLINA
Oct. 10 FLORIDA
Oct. 17 at Georgia
Oct. 24 at Vanderbilt
Nov. 5 MISSISSIPPI STATE
Nov. 14 vs. BYU (Kansas City, MO)
Nov. 21 TENNESSEE
Nov. 28 at Arkansas

SOUTH CAROLINA

Sept. 3 vs. North Carolina (Charlotte, NC)
Sept. 12 KENTUCKY
Sept. 19 at Georgia
Sept. 26 UCF
Oct. 3 at Missouri
Oct. 10 LSU
Oct. 17 VANDERBILT
Oct. 31 at Texas A&M
Nov. 7 at Tennessee
Nov. 14 FLORIDA
Nov. 21 THE CITADEL
Nov. 28 CLEMSON

TENNESSEE

Sept. 5 vs. Bowling Green (Nashville, TN)
Sept. 12 OKLAHOMA
Sept. 19 WESTERN CAROLINA
Sept. 26 at Florida
Oct. 3 ARKANSAS
Oct. 10 GEORGIA
Oct. 24 at Alabama
Oct. 31 at Kentucky
Nov. 7 SOUTH CAROLINA
Nov. 14 NORTH TEXAS
Nov. 21 at Missouri
Nov. 28 VANDERBILT

TEXAS A&M

Sept. 5 vs. Arizona State (Houston, TX)
Sept. 12 BALL STATE
Sept. 19 NEVADA
Sept. 26 vs. Arkansas (Arlington, TX)
Oct. 3 MISSISSIPPI STATE
Oct. 17 ALABAMA
Oct. 24 at Ole Miss
Oct. 31 SOUTH CAROLINA
Nov. 7 AUBURN
Nov. 14 WESTERN CAROLINA
Nov. 21 at Vanderbilt
Nov. 28 at LSU

VANDERBILT

Sept. 5 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Sept. 12 GEORGIA
Sept. 19 AUSTIN PEAY
Sept. 26 at Ole Miss
Oct. 3 at Middle Tennessee
Oct. 17 at South Carolina
Oct. 24 MISSOURI
Oct. 31 at Houston
Nov. 7 at Florida
Nov. 14 KENTUCKY
Nov. 21 TEXAS A&M
Nov. 28 at Tennessee

SUN BELT

APPALACHIAN STATE

Sept. 5 HOWARD
Sept. 12 at Clemson
Sept. 26 at Old Dominion
Oct. 3 WYOMING
Oct. 10 at Georgia State
Oct. 17 at ULM
Oct. 22 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Oct. 31 TROY
Nov. 5 ARKANSAS STATE
Nov. 14 at Idaho
Nov. 28 LOUISIANA
Dec. 5 at South Alabama

ARKANSAS STATE

Sept. 5 at USC
Sept. 12 MISSOURI
Sept. 19 MISSOURI STATE
Sept. 26 at Toledo
Oct. 3 IDAHO
Oct. 13 at South Alabama
Oct. 20 LOUISIANA
Oct. 31 GEORGIA STATE
Nov. 5 at Appalachian State
Nov. 14 at ULM
Nov. 28 at New Mexico State
Dec. 5 TEXAS STATE

GEORGIA STATE

Sept. 4 CHARLOTTE
Sept. 12 at New Mexico State
Sept. 19 at Oregon
Oct. 3 LIBERTY
Oct. 10 APPALACHIAN STATE
Oct. 17 at Ball State
Oct. 31 at Arkansas State
Nov. 7 LOUISIANA
Nov. 14 at Texas State
Nov. 21 SOUTH ALABAMA
Nov. 27 TROY
Dec. 5 at Georgia Southern

GEORGIA SOUTHERN

Sept. 5 at West Virginia
Sept. 12 WESTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 19 THE CITADEL
Sept. 26 at Idaho
Oct. 3 at ULM
Oct. 17 NEW MEXICO STATE
Oct. 22 at Appalachian State
Oct. 29 TEXAS STATE
Nov. 14 at Troy
Nov. 21 at Georgia
Nov. 28 SOUTH ALABAMA
Dec. 5 GEORGIA STATE

IDAHO

Sept. 3 OHIO
Sept. 12 at USC
Sept. 19 WOFFORD
Sept. 26 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Oct. 3 at Arkansas State
Oct. 17 at Troy
Oct. 24 ULM
Oct. 31 at New Mexico State
Nov. 7 at South Alabama
Nov. 14 APPALACHIAN STATE
Nov. 21 at Auburn
Nov. 28 TEXAS STATE

LOUISIANA

Sept. 5 at Kentucky
Sept. 12 NORTHWESTERN STATE
Sept. 26 AKRON
Oct. 3 at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 10 TEXAS STATE
Oct. 20 at Arkansas State
Oct. 31 ULM
Nov. 7 at Georgia State
Nov. 12 at South Alabama
Nov. 21 NEW MEXICO STATE
Nov. 28 at Appalachian State
Dec. 5 TROY

LOUISIANA-MONROE (ULM)

Sept. 5 at Georgia
Sept. 12 NICHOLLS STATE
Sept. 26 at Alabama
Oct. 3 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Oct. 10 at Tulsa
Oct. 17 APPALACHIAN STATE
Oct. 24 at Idaho
Oct. 31 at Louisiana
Nov. 7 at Troy
Nov. 14 ARKANSAS STATE
Nov. 19 at Texas State
Nov. 28 at Hawaii
Dec. 5 NEW MEXICO STATE

NEW MEXICO STATE

Sept. 5 at Florida
Sept. 12 GEORGIA STATE
Sept. 19 UTEP
Oct. 3 at New Mexico
Oct. 10 at Ole Miss
Oct. 17 at Georgia Southern
Oct. 24 TROY
Oct. 31 IDAHO
Nov. 7 at Texas State
Nov. 21 at Louisiana
Nov. 28 ARKANSAS STATE
Dec. 5 at ULM

SOUTH ALABAMA

Sept. 5 GARDNER-WEBB
Sept. 12 at Nebraska
Sept. 19 at San Diego State
Sept. 26 NC STATE
Oct. 3 at Troy
Oct. 13 ARKANSAS STATE
Oct. 24 at Texas State
Nov. 7 IDAHO
Nov. 12 LOUISIANA
Nov. 21 at Georgia State
Nov. 28 at Georgia Southern
Dec. 5 APPALACHIAN STATE

TEXAS STATE

Sept. 5 at Florida State
Sept. 12 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M
Sept. 19 SOUTHERN MISS
Sept. 26 at Houston
Oct. 10 at Louisiana
Oct. 24 SOUTH ALABAMA
Oct. 29 at Georgia Southern
Nov. 7 NEW MEXICO STATE
Nov. 14 GEORGIA STATE
Nov. 19 ULM
Nov. 28 at Idaho
Dec. 5 at Arkansas State

TROY

Sept. 5 at NC State
Sept. 12 CHARLESTON SOUTHERN
Sept. 19 at Wisconsin
Oct. 3 SOUTH ALABAMA
Oct. 10 at Mississippi State
Oct. 17 IDAHO
Oct. 24 at New Mexico State
Oct. 31 at Appalachian State
Nov. 7 ULM
Nov. 14 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Nov. 27 at Georgia State
Dec. 5 at Louisiana

2015-16 BOWL SCHEDULE

The postseason was better than ever in 2014, thanks to the four-team playoff, and now the postseason is bigger than ever, too. The NCAA approved three bowls — in Austin, Texas; Orlando, Fla., and Tucson, Ariz. — bringing the grand total to 42. With 82 postseason slots available for 128 teams, it's fair to wonder if there will be enough eligible teams (read: 6-6 or better) to fill all the spots, but the NCAA can always just issue a waiver to allow a 5-7 team into the ever-expanding party.

(NOTE: Many of the dates of the bowls were not set as of press time.)

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Monday, January 11
Glendale, Ariz.
U. of Phoenix Stadium

NATIONAL SEMIFINAL: COTTON BOWL
Thursday, December 31
Arlington, Texas
AT&T Stadium

NATIONAL SEMIFINAL: ORANGE BOWL
Thursday, December 31
Miami Gardens, Fla.
Sun Life Stadium

PEACH BOWL
Thursday, December 31
Atlanta, Ga. • Georgia Dome
At-Large vs. At-Large

FIESTA BOWL
Friday, January 1
Glendale, Ariz. • U. of Phoenix Stadium
At-Large vs. At-Large

ROSE BOWL
Friday, Jan. 1
Pasadena, Calif.
Rose Bowl
Big Ten vs. Pac-12

SUGAR BOWL
Friday, Jan. 1
New Orleans, La.
Superdome
Big 12 vs. SEC

AUSTIN BOWL
Date: TBA
Austin, Texas
AAC vs. Sun Belt

NEW ORLEANS BOWL
Date: TBA
New Orleans, La.
C-USA vs. MAC

NEW MEXICO BOWL
Date: TBA
Albuquerque
C-USA vs. MW

ROYAL PURPLE LAS VEGAS BOWL
Date: TBA
Las Vegas, Nev.
Pac-12 vs. MW/BYU

FAMOUS IDAHO POTATO BOWL
Date: TBA
Boise, Idaho
MAC vs. MW

CAMELLIA BOWL
Date: TBA
Montgomery, Ala.
MAC vs. Sun Belt

MIAMI BEACH BOWL
Date: TBA
Miami, Fla.
C-USA vs. AAC

BOCA RATON BOWL
Date: TBA
Boca Raton, Fla.
MAC vs. AAC

BAHAMAS BOWL
Date: TBA
Nassau, Bahamas
MAC vs. C-USA

HEART OF DALLAS BOWL
Date: TBA
Dallas
Big Ten vs. C-USA

QUICK LANE BOWL
Date: TBA
Detroit, Mich.
Big Ten vs. ACC

ST. PETERSBURG BOWL
Date: TBA
St. Petersburg, Fla.
AAC vs. C-USA

MILITARY BOWL
Date: TBA
Annapolis, Md.
ACC vs. AAC

INDEPENDENCE BOWL
Date: TBA
Shreveport, La.
ACC vs. SEC

PINSTRIPE BOWL
Date: TBA
Bronx, N.Y.
ACC vs. Big Ten

LIBERTY BOWL
Date: TBA
Memphis, Tenn.
Big 12 vs. SEC

RUSSELL ATHLETIC BOWL
Date: TBA
Orlando, Fla.
ACC vs. Big 12

ADVOCARE TEXAS BOWL
Date: TBA
Houston, Texas
Big 12 vs. SEC

MUSIC CITY BOWL
Date: TBA
Nashville, Tenn.
SEC vs. ACC/Big Ten

BELK BOWL
Date: TBA
Charlotte, N.C.
ACC vs. SEC

FOSTER FARMS BOWL
Date: TBA
Santa Clara, Calif.
Big Ten vs. Pac-12

ARMED FORCES BOWL
Date: TBA
Fort Worth, Texas
Big Ten vs. MW

CACTUS BOWL
Date: TBA
Phoenix
Big 12 vs. Pac-12

BIRMINGHAM BOWL
Date: TBA
Birmingham, Ala.
SEC vs. AAC

GODADDY BOWL
Date: TBA
Mobile, Ala.
MAC vs. Sun Belt

CURE BOWL
Date: Dec. 19
Orlando, Fla.
AAC vs. Sun Belt

POINSETTIA BOWL
Date: Dec. 23
San Diego, Calif.
MW vs. Army

HAWAII BOWL
Date: Dec. 24
Honolulu, Hawaii
AAC vs. MW/BYU

SUN BOWL
Date: Dec. 26
El Paso, Texas
ACC/ND vs. Pac-12

ARIZONA BOWL
Date: Dec. 29
Tucson, Ariz.
C-USA vs. MW

HOLIDAY BOWL
Date: Dec. 30
San Diego, Calif.
Big Ten vs. Pac-12

OUTBACK BOWL
Date: Jan. 1
Tampa, Fla.
Big Ten vs. SEC

CITRUS BOWL
Date: Jan. 1
Orlando, Fla.
Big Ten/ACC vs. SEC

TAXSLAYER BOWL
Date: Jan. 2
Jacksonville, Fla.
Big Ten vs. SEC

ALAMO BOWL
Date: Jan. 2
San Antonio, Texas
Big 12 vs. Pac-12

2015 COLLEGE FANTASY FOOTBALL RANKINGS

by Todd DeVries & Mike Bainbridge, CollegeFootballGeek.com

QUARTERBACKS

1.	Trevone Boykin	TCU
2.	Brandon Doughty	W. Kentucky
3.	Deshaun Watson	Clemson
4.	Dak Prescott	Mississippi State
5.	Luke Falk	Washington State
6.	J.T. Barrett	Ohio State
7.	Vernon Adams	Oregon
8.	Seth Russell	Baylor
9.	Fredi Knighten	Arkansas State
10.	Jeremy Johnson	Auburn
11.	Taysom Hill	BYU
12.	Joshua Dobbs	Tennessee
13.	Cody Kessler	USC
14.	Jared Goff	California
15.	Marquise Williams	North Carolina
16.	Patrick Mahomes	Texas Tech
17.	Keenan Reynolds	Navy
18.	Mike Bercovici	Arizona State
19.	Matt Johnson	Bowling Green
20.	Anu Solomon	Arizona
21.	Kyle Allen	Texas A&M
22.	Drew Hare	Northern Illinois
23.	Greg Ward Jr	Houston
24.	Gunner Kiel	Cincinnati
25.	Justin Thomas	Georgia Tech
26.	Jaquez Johnson	Florida Atlantic
27.	Chuckie Keeton	Utah State
28.	Kurt Benkert	East Carolina
29.	Tyler Jones	Texas State
30.	Blake Frohnapfel	Massachusetts
31.	Skyler Howard	West Virginia
32.	Malik Zaire	Notre Dame
33.	Zach Terrell	Western Michigan
34.	Sam Richardson	Iowa State
35.	Mason Rudolph	Oklahoma State

RUNNING BACKS

1.	Kareem Hunt	Toledo
2.	Jarvion Franklin	W. Michigan
3.	Nick Chubb	Georgia
4.	Leon Allen	W. Kentucky
5.	Devon Johnson	Marshall
6.	Donnel Pumphrey	San Diego St.
7.	Ezekiel Elliott	Ohio State
8.	Kenneth Dixon	Louisiana Tech
9.	James Conner	Pittsburgh
10.	Samaje Perine	Oklahoma
11.	Corey Clement	Wisconsin
12.	Elijah McGuire	Louisiana
13.	Nick Wilson	Arizona
14.	Marcus Cox	Appalachian State
15.	Devontae Booker	Utah
16.	Royce Freeman	Oregon
17.	Matt Breida	Georgia Southern
18.	Daniel Lasco	California
19.	Michael Gordon	Arkansas State
20.	Leonard Fournette	LSU
21.	Aaron Green	TCU
22.	Derrick Henry	Alabama
23.	Dalvin Cook	Florida State
24.	Shock Linwood	Baylor
25.	Kenneth Farrow	Houston
26.	A.J. Ouellette	Ohio
27.	Anthone Taylor	Buffalo
28.	Paul Perkins	UCLA
29.	Jordan Howard	Indiana
30.	Marteze Waller	Fresno State
31.	Justin Jackson	Northwestern
32.	Travis Greene	Bowling Green
33.	Ray Lawry	Old Dominion
34.	Jonathan Williams	Arkansas
35.	Aaron Jones	UTEP

WIDE RECEIVERS

1.	Rashard Higgins	Colorado State
2.	Keevan Lucas	Tulsa
3.	Corey Davis	Western Michigan
4.	Corey Coleman	Baylor
5.	Tajae Sharpe	Massachusetts
6.	River Cracraft	Washington State
7.	William Fuller	Notre Dame
8.	Nelson Spruce	Colorado
9.	Josh Doctson	TCU
10.	JuJu Smith	USC
11.	Tyler Boyd	Pittsburgh
12.	Sterling Shepard	Oklahoma
13.	K.D. Cannon	Baylor
14.	D'haquille Williams	Auburn
15.	Pharoh Cooper	South Carolina
16.	Artavis Scott	Clemson
17.	Leonte Carroo	Rutgers
18.	Isaiah Jones	East Carolina
19.	Devonte Boyd	UNLV
20.	Mitch Mathews	BYU
21.	Josh Reynolds	Texas A&M
22.	Teldrick Morgan	New Mexico St.
23.	Jared Dangerfield	W. Kentucky
24.	Jakeem Grant	Texas Tech
25.	Cayleb Jones	Arizona
26.	Mike Williams	Clemson
27.	Tyler Winston	San Jose State
28.	Hunter Sharp	Utah State
29.	Victor Bolden	Oregon State
30.	Dom Williams	Washington State
31.	Devin Lauderdale	Texas Tech
32.	Speedy Noil	Texas A&M
33.	Jordan Villamin	Oregon State
34.	DeMarcus Robinson	Florida
35.	Laquon Treadwell	Ole Miss

TIGHT ENDS

1.	Jonnu Smith	Florida International
2.	Bucky Hodges	Virginia Tech
3.	Evan Engram	Ole Miss
4.	Cam Serigne	Wake Forest
5.	Rodney Mills	Massachusetts
6.	Hunter Henry	Arkansas
7.	Joel Ruiz	Georgia State
8.	Jake Roh	Boise State
9.	Deon-Tay McManus	Marshall
10.	Steven Scheu	Vanderbilt
11.	Kivon Cartwright	Colorado State
12.	Josiah Price	Michigan State
13.	Dan Vitale	Northwestern
14.	Charles Jones II	Tulane
15.	Jarred Gipson	Nevada
16.	Braxton Deaver	Duke
17.	Standish Dobard	Miami (FL)
18.	Billy Freeman	San Jose State
19.	Austin Hooper	Stanford
20.	Deon Watson	Idaho

KICKERS

1.	Roberto Aguayo	Florida State
2.	Jaden Oberkrom	TCU
3.	Chris Callahan	Baylor
4.	Garrett Schwettman	W. Kentucky
5.	Ka'imi Fairbairn	UCLA
6.	Ross Martin	Duke
7.	Casey Skowron	Arizona
8.	Andy Phillips	Utah
9.	Josh Lambert	West Virginia
10.	Ian Frye	Virginia
11.	Sean Nuernberger	Ohio State
12.	Brad Craddock	Maryland
13.	Elliott Fry	South Carolina
14.	John Wallace	Louisville
15.	Zane Gonzalez	Arizona State
16.	Ammon Lakip	Clemson
17.	Marshall Morgan	Georgia
18.	Austin Lopez	San Jose State
19.	Drew Brown	Nebraska
20.	Andrew Baggett	Missouri

DEFENSE & SPECIAL TEAMS

1.	TCU
2.	Ohio State
3.	Michigan State
4.	Alabama
5.	Ole Miss
6.	Stanford
7.	LSU
8.	Florida State
9.	Penn State
10.	Clemson
11.	Louisville
12.	Mississippi State
13.	Missouri
14.	Florida
15.	Georgia
16.	Utah State
17.	Washington
18.	Temple
19.	Virginia Tech
20.	Utah

Scoring System Used for CFG Rankings:

4 points per passing touchdown • 6 points per rushing/receiving touchdown • 25 passing yards = 1 point
10 rushing/receiving yards = 1 point • 1 interception = -2 point • 1 reception = 0.5 points

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PICKING **FCS**

North Dakota State Dynasty Marches On

The 2014 season was supposed to yield a new champion in the Football Championship Subdivision.

After raising its third consecutive NCAA trophy in January of 2014, North Dakota State waved goodbye to 23 seniors, watched as legendary head coach Craig Bohl took on the same position at Wyoming, and had to hire seven new assistants to fill staff voids created when Bohl left and defensive coordinator Chris Klieman was promoted to head coach.

Noting the sea change, the skeptics doubted NDSU had the stability to win an unprecedented fourth straight title.

Klieman and Co. heard the naysayers loud and clear, and shouted them down to the tune of a 15-1 record and a fourth straight title that culminated with a thrilling 29-27 win over Illinois State in the championship.

"I think myself, the guys who stayed on the coaching staff, as well as all the upperclassmen who knew the program, definitely had a chip on their shoulder," Klieman said.

"I told the guys in one of our first meetings there may be new voices in the room, some new leaders in different positions, but it's the same Bison football team, the same Bison culture. Those seniors, I credit those guys. They knew it was going to be a challenge, but they wanted to go out on top. They weren't going to be denied."

With title No. 4 in the rear-view mirror, few would dare to doubt NDSU's ability in 2015, even if 10 starters — including more than half of a record-setting defense — have departed. The more experienced talent in 2015 resides within the offense, where eight starters return. Included in that group is 6-5, 222-pound senior quarterback Carson Wentz, who provided production with his arm (3,111 passing yards, 25 TDs), feet (642 rushing yards, six TDs) and leadership.

"Carson came into his own in the middle of last season and just kept getting better, kept getting more confident," said Klieman, a former teammate of Kurt Warner at Northern Iowa who knows a little something about heady quarterback play.

"The whole nation, at least in FCS, understood how good he was when he got into that playoff run and brought a team from behind in three of four playoff games. He never panics. ... He's as good a clutch quarterback as I've seen."

Defensively, the Bison must replace All-Americans in defensive end Kyle Emanuel and safety Colten Heagle, and will turn to returning starters like nose guard Brian Schaetz (51 tackles) and cornerback C.J. Smith (17 passes broken up) to help fill the void.

Getting a chance to play for a fifth straight title will mean surviving the gauntlet that is the Missouri Valley Football Conference, which featured five members of the playoff round of 16, and will again be stacked.

Challenges in the conference will come from an Illinois State team hell-bent on revenge, as well as 2014 playoff teams Indiana State, UNI and South Dakota State. Challenges nationally will come from programs including Villanova — which returns Walter Payton Award winner John Robertson at quarterback and Buck Buchanan Award runner-up Don Cherry at linebacker — and a Sam Houston State team that reached the national semifinals last year and has most of its core intact.

The FCS postseason will undergo a slight alteration in 2015, after the MEAC forfeited its automatic playoff bid to participate in the ESPN Celebration Bowl, pitting the champs of the MEAC and SWAC.

— Tony Moss

FCS **TOP 25**

1. North Dakota State	One for the thumb? Bison would be active FCS titles leader with a fifth championship.
2. Villanova	Wildcats have CAA Football's biggest stars in QB John Robertson, LB Don Cherry.
3. Sam Houston State	North Dakota State has ended Bearkats' season three of past four years. Revenge time?
4. Illinois State	Marshaun Coprich a candidate to become first RB to win Walter Payton Award since '03.
5. Chattanooga	Jacob Huesman completed 68.5 percent of his passes, also rushed for over 1,000 yards.
6. Jacksonville State	QB Eli Jenkins will try to get Gamecocks back to playoffs after bitter Round of 16 defeat.
7. Coastal Carolina	Backfield of QB Alex Ross, RB De'Angelo Henderson is one of nation's toughest.
8. Eastern Washington	Wideout Cooper Kupp has 197 catches and 38 TDs in just two seasons at EWU.
9. New Hampshire	Wildcats probably won't go 8-0 in CAA again, but 12th straight playoff trip a good bet.
10. South Dakota State	Trip to Kansas (Sept. 5) could be a good opportunity for FCS to take down Power-5 team.
11. Montana State	Bobcats seek playoffs, and to avenge bitter losses to EWU (52-51) and Montana (34-7).
12. Richmond	Reggie Diggs (85 receptions, 1,157 yards, 7 TDs) starred as Spiders returned to playoffs.
13. Liberty	WR duo of Darrin Peterson, Dante' Shells combined for over 1,900 receiving yards in '14.
14. UNI	Panthers handed North Dakota State its only loss of 2014, and in decisive (23-3) fashion.
15. Stephen F. Austin	After transferring from UTSA to play for his dad, QB Zach Conque engineered playoff bid.
16. Montana	Could Bob Stitt become third D-II hire to win FCS title with Griz (Don Read, Joe Glenn)?
17. James Madison	Ex-Georgia Tech QB Vad Lee returns after throwing 30 TD passes in playoff year for Dukes.
18. Eastern Kentucky	Troubled ex-Ohio State DE Noah Spence arrives at EKU, should be menace to OVC QBs.
19. South Carolina St.	Bulldogs' prize for winning MEAC would be berth in first annual Celebration Bowl (12/19).
20. Indiana State	Mike Sanford coached Sycamores to first playoff berth since 1984 — can they do it again?
21. William & Mary	Tribe (7-5) have talent returning, but must learn to win close games in rugged CAA.
22. Youngstown State	Youngstown native Bo Pelini's first YSU team has talent, including RB Martin Ruiz.
23. Fordham	Marshall transfer Kevin Anderson in the mix to replace record-setting QB Michael Nebrich.
24. McNeese State	Cowboys (6-5) should be mad after three-game losing streak to end '14 sunk playoff hopes.
25. Harvard	Crimson enter year on 14-game win streak; Dartmouth (10/31) could be biggest Ivy threat.

Lindy's 2015 ALL-FCS Team

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	John Robertson	Sr.	Villanova
RB	Marshaun Coprich	Sr.	Illinois State
RB	Chase Edmonds	So.	Fordham
WR	Cooper Kupp	Jr.	Eastern Washington
WR	Darrin Peterson	Sr.	Liberty
TE	Temarrick Hemingway	Sr.	South Carolina State
OL	J.P. Flynn	Jr.	Montana State
OL	Joe Haeg	Sr.	North Dakota State
OL	Corey Levin	Jr.	Chattanooga
OL	Abe M'Bodj	Sr.	Bryant
OL	Cole Toner	Sr.	Harvard
AP	Johnta' Hebert	Sr.	Prairie View A&M
K	John Lunsford	Sr.	Liberty

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	James Cowser	Sr.	Southern Utah
DL	Javon Hargrave	Sr.	South Carolina State
DL	Devaunte Sigler	Sr.	Jacksonville State
DL	Jonathan Woodard	Sr.	Central Arkansas
LB	Kourtney Berry	Jr.	Alabama State
LB	Don Cherry	Sr.	Villanova
LB	Connor Underwood	Sr.	Indiana State
DB	Casey DeAndrade	Jr.	New Hampshire
DB	Jermaine Hough	Sr.	Jacksonville State
DB	Donald Payne	Jr.	Stetson
DB	Matt Smalley	Sr.	Lafayette
P	Ben LeCompte	Sr.	North Dakota State
RET	Pokey Harris	Sr.	Murray State

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Jacob Huesman	Sr.	Chattanooga
RB	Connor Kacsor	Sr.	Dayton
RB	Dy'Shawn Mobley	Sr.	Eastern Kentucky
WR	Ed Eagan	Sr.	Northwestern State
WR	Jake Wieneke	So.	South Dakota State
TE	Jordan Payne	Sr.	Alcorn State
OL	Sam Frye	Sr.	The Citadel
OL	Bruce Johnson	Sr.	Maine
OL	Andrew Jones	Sr.	William & Mary
OL	Garrick Mayweather	Sr.	Fordham
OL	Aaron Neary	Sr.	Eastern Washington
AP	Tarik Cohen	Jr.	North Carolina A&T
K	Michael Schmadeke	Sr.	Northern Iowa

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Teddy Corwin	Sr.	Illinois State
DL	P.J. Hall	So.	Sam Houston State
DL	Victor Ochi	Sr.	Stony Brook
DL	Chima Uzowihe	Sr.	Liberty
LB	Cory Magwood	Sr.	Furman
LB	Will McNamara	Sr.	Dartmouth
LB	James Rentz	Sr.	Sacred Heart
DB	Marcus Alford	Sr.	Northern Arizona
DB	Tim Kilfoy	Sr.	UNI
DB	Harlan Miller	Sr.	Southeastern Louisiana
DB	Jourdan Wickliffe	Sr.	Eastern Illinois
P	Lachlan Edwards	Sr.	Sam Houston State
RET	Antonio Hamilton	Sr.	South Carolina State

THE BIG ONES

AUGUST 29
North Dakota State at Montana — The Bob Stitt era starts for the Griz, and Washington-Grizzly Stadium should be rocking.

SEPTEMBER 5
Youngstown State at Pittsburgh — Bo Pelini era begins against Pitt, now coached by Youngstown native (and former Penguin) Pat Narduzzi.

OCTOBER 10
UNI at North Dakota State — UNI handed NDSU its lone loss of '14, and Bison coach Chris Klieman — a UNI alum and former staffer — couldn't have been pleased.

NOVEMBER 21
Villanova at James Madison — Don't be surprised if CAA Football race comes down to the final week in Harrisonburg.

DECEMBER 19
ESPN Celebration Bowl (Atlanta) — MEAC and SWAC champions meet in newly created event to be held at the Georgia Dome.

2014 PLAYOFFS

FIRST ROUND

Fordham	44
Sacred Heart	22
Indiana State	36
Eastern Kentucky	16
Richmond	46
Morgan State	24
Sam Houston State	21
SE Louisiana	17
Liberty	26
James Madison	21
Montana	52
San Diego	14
South Dakota State	47
Montana State	40
Northern Iowa	44
Stephen F. Austin	10

SECOND ROUND

New Hampshire	44
Fordham	19
Chattanooga	35
Indiana State	14
Illinois State	41
Northern Iowa	21
Coastal Carolina	36
Richmond	18
Sam Houston State	37
Jacksonville State	26
North Dakota State	27
South Dakota State	24
Villanova	29
Liberty	22
Eastern Washington	37
Montana	20

QUARTERFINALS

New Hampshire	35
Chattanooga	30
North Dakota State	39
Coastal Carolina	32
Sam Houston State	34
Villanova	31
Illinois State	59
Eastern Washington	46

SEMIFINALS

North Dakota State	35
Sam Houston State	3
Illinois State	21
New Hampshire	18

CHAMPIONSHIP

North Dakota State	29
Illinois State	27

Photo by Tim Heitman-USA TODAY Sports

Most Valuable Player	Offensive Player of the Year	Defensive Player of the Year	Newcomer of the Year
John Robertson, QB, Villanova	Marshaun Coprich, RB, Illinois State	Javon Hargrave, DE, South Carolina St.	Noah Spence, DE, Eastern Kentucky

FCS CONFERENCES

By Tony Moss

BIG SKY CONFERENCE

Offensive Player of the Year: Cooper Kupp, WR, Eastern Washington
Defensive Player of the Year: James Cowser, DE, Southern Utah

The Big Sky sent its three most recognizable and consistent programs to the FCS playoffs in 2014, as Eastern Washington (11-3, 7-1), Montana (9-5, 6-2) and Montana State (8-5, 6-2) made the field of 24 while bubbles burst for a glut of other teams (8-4 Idaho State and 7-5 Northern Arizona, Cal Poly and Sacramento State) in a league that proved difficult to navigate from top to bottom. EWU went the farthest, losing to Illinois State in the national quarterfinals, then watched as star quarterback Vernon Adams Jr. made the controversial decision to transfer to Oregon for his final season of eligibility. That makes the Eagles' place atop the league perilous, as does a coaching change at Montana. Mick Delaney's retirement saddles Bob Stitt with the task of trying to bring the Griz their third national title, though the program loses a number of All-Big Sky performers, including QB Jordan Johnson. Cal Poly and Idaho State look like the primary X-factors in the conference race.

1. Eastern Washington	Junior QB Jordan West went 3-1 as a starter after Adams was injured last season.
2. Montana State	Dual-threat QB Dakota Prukop (31 rush/pass TDs) led Bobcats back to playoffs.
3. Montana	Bob Stitt (108-62 at D-II Colorado School of Mines) takes over elite FCS program.
4. Cal Poly	QB Chris Brown, RB Kori Garcia back for 7-5 team that led FCS in rushing.
5. Idaho State	Wealth of talent returns for resurgent Bengals, but solving QB issue is vital.
6. Northern Arizona	Lumberjacks (7-5) always have talent, often seem to fall apart late in the year.
7. Sacramento State	Hornets will miss top WR DeAndre Carter, but Nnamdi Agude can help fill void.
8. North Dakota	UND went 5-7, but Bubba Schweigert fielded league's top 'D' (354.4 ypg).
9. Southern Utah	Six all-league defenders return, but 3-9 group gave up 523.5 yards per game.
10. UC Davis	Once-proud D-II program has yet to figure it out in FCS, slipped to 2-9 in 2014.
11. Portland State	Limbo: Interim coach Bruce Barnum given one-year audition to impress new AD.
12. Weber State	Wildcats are 6-29 since John L. Smith left program at altar, need more talent.
13. Northern Colorado	Program is 18-83 since 2006; will give spread offense a shot this season.

BIG SOUTH CONFERENCE

Offensive Player of the Year: Alex Ross, QB, Coastal Carolina
Defensive Player of the Year: Chima Uzowihe, DE, Liberty

The Big South continued to make strides nationally last season, as Coastal Carolina and Liberty represented the then-six-team conference in the FCS playoffs, and both knocked out opponents from the mighty CAA in their postseason openers. Five of the league's six teams finished with winning records, including a resurgent Presbyterian College (6-5, 3-2) program and league newbie Monmouth (6-5, 1-4). Again, Coastal Carolina and Liberty will be the hunted, with Charleston Southern (8-4, 3-2) the top dark horse candidate. First-year program Kennesaw State is likely to have it rough in its rookie campaign.

1. Coastal Carolina	Ross finished seventh in voting for Walter Payton Award (top FCS player) last year.
2. Liberty	Eight all-league picks return for Turner Gill's squad, though defense suffered losses.
3. Charleston Southern	Buccaneers handed Liberty lone league loss; LB Aaron Brown again leads defense.
4. Presbyterian	Blue Hose were 5-2 vs. FCS programs in 2014, including 2-0 vs. the SoCon.
5. Monmouth	RB Lavon Chaney back after leading league in all-purpose yards (135.1 per game).
6. Gardner-Webb	Runnin' Bulldogs (4-8) out for revenge after losing all five league games last season.
7. Kennesaw State	Coach Brian Bohannon is a longtime disciple of Georgia Tech's Paul Johnson.

CAA FOOTBALL

Offensive Player of the Year: John Robertson, QB, Villanova
Defensive Player of the Year: Don Cherry, LB, Villanova

Making an 11th consecutive appearance in the FCS playoffs, CAA Football champ New Hampshire was within 15 minutes of making its first championship game appearance in school history. But the Wildcats (12-2, 8-0) could not hold an 18-6 lead, falling 21-18 to Illinois State and denying Sean McDonnell's team a chance at the big prize. After losing nine All-CAA standouts, getting to that doorstep again could prove difficult. Villanova (11-3, 7-1), James Madison (9-4, 6-2) and Richmond (9-5, 5-3) also were playoff teams a year ago and have designs on the league crown. Nova welcomes back Walter Payton Award-winning quarterback John Robertson, who was held out of a quarterfinal loss to Sam Houston State due to concussion symptoms. Linebacker Don Cherry, who finished second in Buck Buchanan Award (FCS Defensive Player of the Year) voting, is also back for Andy Talley's squad. QB Vad Lee, who had a strong first year following his transfer from Georgia Tech, is back to lead JMU. Of last year's non-playoff CAA teams, look out for William & Mary (7-5, 4-4), which narrowly missed the postseason a year ago, and 2013 national finalist Towson (4-8, 2-6), which isn't likely to be down long under head coach Rob Ambrose.

1. Villanova	Robertson has accounted for an astounding 107 TDs (62 pass, 45 rush) in three years.
2. New Hampshire	QB Sean Goldrich accounted for 25 TDs (16 pass, 9 rush) in platoon a year ago.
3. Richmond	WRs Reggie Diggs, Brian Brown return after combining for 2,200-plus yards in '14.
4. James Madison	Everett Withers era began with a bang, but defense suffered some notable losses.
5. William & Mary	RB Mikal Abdul-Saboor back after leading league in rushing yards (115.1 per game).
6. Towson	Tigers struggled on offense, but returning RB Darius Victor (1,305 yds.) a bright spot.
7. Delaware	Blue Hens (6-6) in midst of an unthinkable four-year streak of missing playoffs.
8. Stony Brook	DL Victor Ochi back to lead league's No. 1 defense of a year ago (273.3 ypg).
9. Albany	Great Danes managed 7-5 mark thanks to FCS-best plus-15 turnover margin in 2014.
10. Maine	CAA's worst offense (259.1 yards per game) led to fall from playoffs to 5-6.
11. Rhode Island	Rams had rough first year under Jim Fleming (1-11), but beat Towson to end season.
12. Elon	Phoenix (1-11) head into second CAA year, still in search of initial conference win.

IVY LEAGUE

Offensive Player of the Year: Dalyn Willliams, QB, Dartmouth
Defensive Player of the Year: Will McNamara, LB, Dartmouth

After sharing the league title with Princeton in 2013, Harvard (10-0, 7-0) reassumed its role as the Ivy League's dominant program of this millennium with an unbeaten (and mostly unchallenged) season in 2014. The Crimson are 114-25 (.820) since 2001 and have never gone worse than 7-3 over that stretch. Despite some graduation losses, they'll remain the hunted. Who falls in behind them is a more worthy debate. Dartmouth (8-2, 6-1) had some attrition as well, but boasts a senior QB in Williams. Yale (8-2, 5-2) loses Ivy Offensive Player of the Year and RB Tyler Varga along with several other key offensive players. Princeton (5-5, 4-3) slid last year and Penn (2-8, 2-5) and Brown (5-5, 3-4) seem overdue for a renaissance.

1. Harvard	Five All-Ivy picks back from defense that allowed 12.3 points per game, fewest in FCS.
2. Dartmouth	Williams ranked in national top 5 in pass efficiency, completion %, points responsible for.
3. Yale	Upset of Army challenged notion that non-league games are meaningless in the Ivy.
4. Princeton	Bob Surace needs to fix defense that didn't force turnovers or defend the pass in 2014.
5. Brown	Bears (5-5) had five players on All-Ivy first or second team last year, and all are gone.
6. Penn	Assistant Ray Priore takes over for Al Bagnoli, who retired (before surfacing at Columbia).
7. Cornell	Can RB Luke Hagy (734 yds., 6 TD) help Big Red to second winning mark since '99?
8. Columbia	Ex-Penn coach Al Bagnoli tries to fix program with current 21-game losing streak.

MID-EASTERN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

Offensive Player of the Year: Tarik Cohen, RB, North Carolina A&T
Defensive Player of the Year: Javon Hargrave, DE, South Carolina State

After years of speculation and a 15-year drought without a playoff win, the MEAC announced in March that it would give up its automatic bid to the FCS playoffs in favor of the Celebration Bowl, pitting the champions of the MEAC and the SWAC. The game will take place Dec. 19 at the Georgia Dome. That makes Morgan State (7-6, 6-2), which won a convoluted five-way tie-breaker in Lee Hull's first season the league's last auto-bid winner for the foreseeable future. Bethune-Cookman (9-3), North Carolina A&T (9-3), South Carolina State (8-4) and North Carolina Central (7-5) shared the '14 title with Morgan. The three Carolina schools among that group of five have the most returning talent, while B-CU had the most attrition.

1. South Carolina State	Hargave (16 sacks) should be prime contender for Buck Buchanan Award in 2015.
2. North Carolina A&T	Cohen has logged 2,488 yards, 25 TDs through his first two collegiate seasons.
3. N.C. Central	Michael Jones made All-MEAC first team as a cornerback and return specialist.
4. Morgan State	RB Herb Walker Jr. (1,408 yards, 13 TD) a big returning piece for league champs.
5. Bethune-Cookman	Terry Sims elevated from special teams coach following Brian Jenkins' departure.
6. Florida A&M	Ex-James Madison coach Alex Wood the latest to try to fix once-proud Rattlers.
7. Howard	Bison (5-7) will need to find replacement for decorated QB Greg McGhee.
8. Hampton	Pirates had MEAC's top passing attack, but it translated to a 3-9 record.
9. Norfolk State	Latrell Scott gets second FCS coaching shot; DWI led to '11 exit from Richmond.
10. Delaware State	New coach Kenneth Carter worked for Charlie Strong at Louisville (2010-13).
11. Savannah State	Tigers are 4-53 since 2010; last conference win came in 2011 season.

MISSOURI VALLEY FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

Offensive Player of the Year: Marshaun Coprich, RB, Illinois State
Defensive Player of the Year: Connor Underwood, LB, Indiana State

It was another banner year in the Missouri Valley, a league that claimed five teams in the FCS playoff round of 16, and saw North Dakota State (15-1, 7-1) and Illinois State (13-2, 7-1) square off for the national title. NDSU lifted the crown for the fourth straight time, but not before ISU put a serious scare into the Bison in a 29-27 thriller. Also reaching the postseason were UNI (9-5, 6-2), South Dakota State (9-5, 5-3) and Indiana State (8-6, 4-4), with UNI and SDSU both going down to MVFC opponents in the playoffs. In spite of all that drama, the biggest offseason noise was made by non-playoff entry Youngstown State (7-5, 4-4), which hired Youngstown native Bo Pelini just days after his firing at Nebraska. Once again, navigating this league will be a weekly crucible for MVFC combatants.

1. North Dakota State	QB Carson Wentz back, but Chris Klieman must replace seven defensive starters.
2. Illinois State	Backfield of Coprich, QB Tre Roberson is one of the best in all of FCS.
3. South Dakota State	Wideout Jake Wieneke was league's top newcomer after catching 16 TD passes.
4. UNI	Panthers lost RB David Johnson, key defenders from league's No. 1 run defense.
5. Indiana State	JC transfer Zach Kline the top candidate to replace departed QB Mike Perish.
6. Youngstown State	FCS hires rarely get more pub than the Bo Pelini-to-Penguins move last December.
7. Southern Illinois	Salukis (6-6) fell apart after 5-1 start, need more consistency on offensive end.
8. Western Illinois	Narrow losses to NDSU, Illinois State suggest Leathernecks (5-7) are close.
9. South Dakota	Winless league mark mostly due to poor defense (467 yards allowed per game).
10. Missouri State	Longtime Gary Pinkel assistant Dave Steckel replaces the fired Terry Allen.

NORTHEAST CONFERENCE

Offensive Player of the Year: Khairi Dickson, RB, Saint Francis (Pa.)
Defensive Player of the Year: James Rentz, LB, Sacred Heart

Sacred Heart (9-3, 5-1) represented the NEC in the playoffs for a second straight season, also falling to Fordham in the first round for a second consecutive year. The Pioneers will have to replace 11 players who earned all-league honors a season ago, though having a returning QB in RJ Noel is a mark in their favor. Wagner (7-4, 5-1) shared the league crown with Sacred Heart, but has undergone a coaching change following the retirement of Walt Hameline. Bryant (8-3, 4-2) could be ready to change the balance of the league, and the dark horse in the race could be Saint Francis (5-6, 3-3), which has suffered 22 consecutive losing seasons, but has nearly everyone back from a squad that was an extremely tough out a year ago.

1. Bryant	Five All-NEC picks return on offense, including talented RB Ricardo McCray.
2. Sacred Heart	Noel led NEC in all important passing categories, and stud WR Tyler Dube is back.
3. Saint Francis (Pa.)	Red Flash were only NEC team to beat Sacred Heart; return 7 all-league picks.
4. Wagner	Walt Hameline retired after 34 years; OC Jason Houghtaling elevated to top job.
5. Duquesne	Chris King (68 rec., 1,127 yds. 14 TD) is one of great underrated wideouts in FCS.
6. Central Conn. St.	Wins over CAA foes Towson, Rhode Island suggest Blue Devils (3-9) are close.
7. Robert Morris	Cupboard was bare for coach John Banaszak — Colonials committed 37 turnovers.

OHIO VALLEY CONFERENCE

Offensive Player of the Year: DyShawn Mobley, RB, Eastern Kentucky
Defensive Player of the Year: Devaunte Sigler, DT, Jacksonville State

After making a long overdue return to the national map with four playoff wins in 2013, the OVC's postseason struggles started anew in 2014. League champ Jacksonville State (10-2, 8-0) squandered a No. 3 seed with a one-and-done showing, and Eastern Kentucky (9-4, 6-2) was routed on its home field by Indiana State in the first round. The good news is that JSU has most of its returning core back and looks like a top-five team again. EKU has its most electrifying player back in Mobley, and Eastern Illinois (5-7, 5-3), which was victimized in part by a difficult non-league schedule, looks ready to make a serious bid for a playoff return this fall.

1. Jacksonville State	Troymaine Pope, Miles Jones will help replace star RB DaMarcus James.
2. Eastern Kentucky	Mobley's six-touchdown game against Murray State helped Colonels to playoffs.
3. Eastern Illinois	QB Jalen Whitlow (15 pass TD, 12 rush TD) solid in succeeding Jimmy Garoppolo.
4. UT-Martin	Another aggressive non-league slate includes Ole Miss (9/5), Arkansas (10/31).
5. Southeast Missouri	Two quality offensive pieces back in WR Paul McRoberts, RB DeMichael Jackson.
6. Tennessee Tech	Golden Eagles need answers: were worse than 100th in FCS total offense, defense.
7. Tennessee State	DE Gabe Terry a returning bright spot for rebuilding TSU (6-6, 3-5) squad.
8. Murray State	OC Mitch Stewart promoted to top job after Chris Hatcher's defection to Samford.
9. Austin Peay	Govs (1-11, 1-7) were outscored 523-116, still suffering from huge talent void.

PATRIOT LEAGUE

Offensive Player of the Year: Chase Edmonds, RB, Fordham
Defensive Player of the Year: Matt Smalley, CB, Lafayette

One thing is for certain in the 2015 Patriot League race — Fordham (11-3, 6-0) will not have things nearly as easy. The Rams beat five of their six conference opponents by 20 points or more in 2014, but 15 of the 19 players to earn first- or second-team All-Patriot honors have exhausted their eligibility. Bucknell (8-3, 4-2), which lost in overtime to Fordham and was the only opponent to throw a legitimate scare into the Rams, has never made the FCS playoffs, but could be the team to watch. No one else in the league comes off a winning season, but it would be hard to imagine proud programs at Lafayette (5-6, 3-3), Colgate (5-7, 3-3) and Lehigh (3-8, 2-4) all continuing to struggle at the same time.

1. Fordham	Edmonds was a Payton finalist as a freshman in '14, but there's a big hole at QB.
2. Bucknell	All-league RB C.J. Williams, WR Will Carter among Patriot's most exciting talents.
3. Colgate	Win at Bucknell in final week of 2014 suggests Dan Hunt and Raiders are on climb.
4. Holy Cross	Multi-faceted QB Peter Pujals (3,058 yards of offense) is best returning QB in league.
5. Lafayette	Leopards will need to replace RB Ross Schuermann, who exits with 3,504 yards.
6. Lehigh	Mountain Hawks will be more mature after suffering worst mark (3-8) in 22 years.
7. Georgetown	RB Jo'El Kimpela (838 yards, 3 TD) a nice returning piece for Hoyas (3-8, 1-5).

PIONEER FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Offensive Player of the Year: Connor Kacsor, RB, Dayton
Defensive Player of the Year: Donald Payne, S, Stetson

Ironically, the D-I football conference with the closest thing to a pure non-scholarship model has a lot of trouble staying pure. In 2013, San Diego had to drop out of the league title race on the eve of the playoffs due to financial aid mistakes. Last season, Jacksonville (9-2, 7-1) withdrew from the race at the same time of year ... for the same reason. USD (9-3, 7-1) was the PFL's playoff rep in 2014, and was trounced by Montana in the first round. Should they get the rules right, the Toreros and Dolphins should again challenge for the crown. Campbell (5-7, 4-4) and Stetson (5-7, 3-5) have good groups returning and could surprise.

1. Jacksonville	QB Kade Bell (son of coach Kerwin) set school mark with 3,181 passing yards in '14.
2. San Diego	RB Jonah Hodges burst on the scene with 1,214 yards, including 273 vs. Stetson.
3. Dayton	Flyers are consistent presence near top of league, but last won or shared title in 2010.
4. Campbell	FB Dalton Dillon, DL Ugonna Awuruonye made All-PFL first team, and both return.
5. Stetson	Payne finished fifth in Buck Buchanan Award voting after posting 185 tackles.
6. Drake	Bulldogs (7-4) were senior-dominated on lines, but LB John Hugunin returns.
7. Butler	RB Sam Schrader seeks encore after scoring 11 TDs as a freshman for Bulldogs (4-7).
8. Marist	Only PFL team to beat Jacksonville also lost seven All-PFL first- or second-teamers.
9. Valparaiso	Dave Cecchini led Crusaders to four wins after they'd gone 4-51 over previous five.
10. Morehead State	Eagles last posted winning mark in 2007 — Rob Tenyer needs traction in Year Three.
11. Davidson	Paul Nichols seeks first PFL win in third year: WR William Morris (98 rec.) is back.

SOUTHERN CONFERENCE

Offensive Player of the Year: Jacob Huesman, QB, Chattanooga
Defensive Player of the Year: Cory Magwood, LB, Furman

If 2014 was a referendum on the SoCon's ability to remain nationally relevant after Georgia Southern and Appalachian State bolted to the FBS, then the referendum was defeated. The SoCon sent just one team to the FCS playoffs for the first time since 2003, with hoped-for resurgences by one-time FCS name brands Wofford (6-5, 4-3) and Furman (3-9, 2-5) failing to materialize. On the bright side, league champ Chattanooga (10-4, 7-0) acquitted itself well, reaching the national quarterfinals before being edged by New Hampshire, while Western Carolina (7-5, 5-2) emerged from longtime doormat status to throw a new wrinkle into the league race. The Mocs are the clear front-runner again in 2015, and the question again is whether another team will emerge. The SoCon also needs the bottom of the league, where Mercer (6-6, 1-6) and VMI (2-10, 1-6) took up residence last year, to show improvement. East Tennessee State will rejoin the conference in 2016 after playing this season as an FCS independent.

1. Chattanooga	Huesman in line for big year after throwing for 2,731 yards, rushing for 1,009 in '14.
2. Wofford	Veteran O-line gives Terriers hope, but D (12 turnovers forced) needs to make plays.
3. Western Carolina	Next goal for Mark Speir's squad: first back-to-back winning seasons since 1993-94.
4. Furman	Five all-league players return for team that must score some points (17.5 per game).
5. Samford	New coach Chris Hatcher went 45-45 in stints at Georgia Southern, Murray State.
6. The Citadel	Tough schedule includes trips to Georgia Southern (9/19), South Carolina (11/21).
7. Mercer	RB Alex Lakes back after big freshman season (1,107 rushing yards, 17 TD).
8. VMI	Ex-UVa asst. Scott Wachenheim takes over team that last posted winning mark in '81.

SOUTHLAND CONFERENCE

Offensive Player of the Year: Ed Eagan, WR, Northwestern State
Defensive Player of the Year: Jonathan Woodard, DE, Central Arkansas

Any questions about Sam Houston State remaining part of the national and Southland title conversations last season, after head coach Willie Fritz departed for Georgia Southern, were answered rather emphatically. With former Delaware coach K.C. Keeler at the helm, the Bearkats (11-5, 7-1) won a share of the league title, bounced Southeastern Louisiana (9-4, 7-1) in the first round, then went on the road to take out Jacksonville State and Villanova before falling to old nemesis North Dakota State in the national semis. Seven of the nine SHSU players to make the All-Southland first or second teams are back. Stephen F. Austin (8-5, 5-3) should be a factor again after making the playoffs, and Lamar (8-4, 5-3) and Northwestern State (6-6, 4-4) are intriguing thanks to quality groups of returnees.

1. Sam Houston State	QB Jared Johnson racked up over 4,000 yards of O, showed winning instincts.
2. Stephen F. Austin	Clint Conque was Southland Coach of the Year; son and QB Zach top newcomer.
3. McNeese State	Cowboys took Nebraska to the wire, but were done in by November collapse.
4. Northwestern State	Eagan caught 73 balls and racked up 2,169 in all-purpose yardage last season.
5. Central Arkansas	Bears slipped from playoffs to 6-6, but have terrific centerpiece in Woodard.
6. SE Louisiana	Golden Lions lose four All-Southland first-teamers, including QB Bryan Bennett.
7. Lamar	Unknown new starting QB will have good target in Reggie Begelton (67 rec.).
8. Abilene Christian	Wildcats (6-6, 4-4) beat FBS Troy, need more consistency on defense for next step.
9. Incarnate Word	Cardinals fell to 2-9, but DL Corey Lee played well for program that is maturing.
10. Houston Baptist	League win over Nicholls was highlight of first full season for Huskies (2-9, 1-7).
11. Nicholls	New coach Tim Rebowe served as asst. at ULL, has spent whole career in state.

SOUTHWESTERN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

Offensive Player of the Year: John Gibbs Jr., QB, Alcorn State
Defensive Player of the Year: Kourtney Berry LB, Alabama State

Alcorn State (10-3, 7-2) comes off a banner year, as Jay Hopson's Braves reached the SWAC title game for the first time, beating Southern (9-4, 8-1) and bringing the program its first title since Steve McNair led the Braves to the crown in 1993. Although key pieces return for Alcorn, including the multi-talented QB Gibbs, a repeat is going to be tough. Alabama State (7-5, 5-4) upped the ante by hiring Brian Jenkins away from Bethune-Cookman. Second-year coaches at Jackson State (5-7), Alabama A&M (4-8) and Mississippi Valley (2-9) are seeking traction. The West figures to feature Southern and Grambling (7-5, 7-2) prominently.

EAST DIVISION

1. Alabama State	Brian Jenkins brings 46-14 record with him from Bethune-Cookman.
2. Alcorn State	Replacing members of senior-dominated defense will be biggest task for Hopson.
3. Jackson State	Returning QB Lamontiez Ivy (3,209 passing yards) led SWAC in TD passes (22).
4. Alabama A&M	James Spady went 4-8 in first year; team must commit fewer turnovers (29 in '14).
5. Mississippi Valley	Rick Comegy did not have magic elixir for long-struggling MVSU, which went 2-9.

WEST DIVISION

1. Southern*	Wideout Willie Quinn (62 rec.) scored TDs through air (5), on returns (3).
2. Grambling State	Broderick Fobbs restored order, team narrowly missed playing for SWAC title.
3. Prairie View A&M	Ex-Alcorn State OC Willie Simmons replaces Heishma Northern as head coach.
4. Ark.-Pine Bluff	Playmaking DB Kevin Rucker (5 INT) a bright spot for disappointing 4-7 team.
5. Texas Southern	Better line play needed from team that ranked 117th in tackles for loss allowed.

* - Overall conference champion

FCS INDEPENDENTS

East Tennessee State revives a football program that was dropped after the 2003 season — the Buccaneers will rejoin the Southern Conference for football in 2016.

1. East Tennessee State	Former North Carolina coach Carl Torbush leads program into new era.

PICKING **DIVISION II**

Minnesota State has Firepower to Rocket to the Top

The improving depth of talent at the Division II level and the heavy roster turnover from year to year has made it increasingly difficult to peg who will be in contention come playoff time.

After years of domination by powerhouses, led by Grand Valley State and Northwest Missouri State, Division II has seen five different champions crowned over the past five years. Getting to the top typically includes striking while the iron is hot with an experienced star quarterback, and staying there requires continually infusing your talent base with impact transfers.

Colorado State-Pueblo is coming off its first D-II title in any sport, and the ThunderWolves have won four consecutive RMAC Championships. It's an impressive feat by coach John Wristen, who turned a defunct football program into a national champion in just seven seasons. A repeat would appear a daunting challenge, however, with several All-Americans, including quarterback Chris Bonner, having moved on.

After reaching the championship game for the first time in school history, only to get shut out by CSU-Pueblo, Minnesota State is primed to make another strong run. The Mavericks finished 41st in D-II in total offense last year, but Minnesota State returns a slew of playmakers and its dominance of the NSIC in recent seasons sets the team up to secure a high playoff seed.

Returning starters figure to fuel most of the contenders, although West Georgia coach Will Hall loaded up on transfers that he infused into an already-talented depth chart during spring practices.

North Alabama is so loaded with experience — the Lions have 59 lettermen and 15 starters returning — coach Bobby Wallace limited contact during the spring and focused on evaluating his younger players.

"We have a great opportunity ahead of us, but also a great challenge," Wallace said. "This is a mature group and they understand what they need to do."

The depth of competition at the D-II level might be at an all-time high, but the traditional powers continue to plot their return to the top. Grand Valley State won four titles between 2002-06, sent several players to the NFL and was an annual factor in the playoff picture until falling on hard times in a 6-5 campaign in 2014.

"We have guys who came to Grand Valley to compete for championships and they are putting in the work," GVSU coach Matt Mitchell said after the Lakers' spring game. "We'll expect them to get in good shape this summer and be ready to go for fall camp."

Northwest Missouri State bowed out in the first round of the playoffs last season, and coach Adam Dorrel is fine with the perception that the Bearcats are in a rebuilding phase.

"Guys feel like, right now, maybe people will be doubting us a little bit, which I certainly understand," Dorrel said at the end of spring practices. "I think guys understand that they really are going to have to buckle down for us to win next year.

"I want them to attack each day. That is going to be our mantra moving forward. I felt like the last couple of years we have been in the guarded mode where people have been picking us to do this and that and you kind of get in an entrenched type of battle."

—Derek Harper

DIVISION II **TOP 25**

1. Minnesota State	Offensive juggernaut returns top firepower to make another title run; 33 straight NSIC wins.
2. West Georgia	Coach Will Hall added several experienced transfers to load up already talented roster.
3. Minnesota-Duluth	Seven straight playoff appearances and QB Bauer, RB Lauters among 12 returning starters.
4. Bloomsburg	Fourth-year starting QB Kelly, entire o-line, top 3 WRs return; strong D sees 5 new starters.
5. North Alabama	Return 15 starters to squad attempting to become third team to win three straight GSC titles.
6. Pittsburg State	Former Webb City star transfer QB John Roderique will compete to replace departed Abenoja.
7. Concord	Record-setting So. QB Novak at helm; MEC schedule sets Mountain Lions up for another run.
8. Valdosta State	Blazers averaged 454.7 yards and 32.6 points per game, return top four RBs and top six WRs.
9. Delta State	Junior QB Sullivan a Harlon Hill candidate; Fighting Okra returns eight All-GSC performers.
10. Ferris State	Reigning Harlon Hill winning QB Vander Laan led program to first GLIAC title in 15 years.
11. Sioux Falls	Third-year starting QB Papilion at helm of high-octane offense returning nine starters.
12. Ohio Dominican	Untested youngsters battling to replace Harlon Hill finalist QB Miller.
13. Northwest Missouri St.	2014 a step back only by NWMSU standards, but youth threatens to bring transition year.
14. Lenoir-Rhyne	Bears lose pair of 1,000-yard rushers, but run-heavy attack has youth ready to step in.
15. CSU-Pueblo	Coming off first DII title in any sport, ThunderWolves lose four All-Americans and QB Bonner.
16. West Chester	Sophomore QB Werner took charge of spring game with presumptive starter Derr suspended.
17. Angelo State	Coach Will Wagner has veteran leadership to lean on, starting with QB Washington.
18. Michigan Tech	Coach Kearly admits high expectations coming of playoff appearance; 3-man QB competition.
19. Ouachita Baptist	Trenches decimated by graduation, Tigers need immediate help from 29-man recruiting class.
20. Grand Valley State	To rebound from down '14, Lakers need QB Bart Williams to step up and to fix leaky secondary.
21. Colorado Mines	Junior QB Dvorak led D-II with avg. of 389.3 ypg in total offense last season.
22. Tuskegee	Dual-threat QB Lacey returns to lead rush-heavy offense spearheaded by RB Lowe.
23. Ashland (Ohio)	Reigning GLIAC Freshman of the Year QB Tarnowski still young, but knows offense well.
24. Azusa Pacific	Can QB Jeffries build on frosh season (2,282 total yds) minus NCAA rushing champ Watson?
25. Slippery Rock	Ground game must carry load until leader emerges from four-man QB battle.

Lindy's 2015 ALL-DIV II Team

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Jason Vander Laan	Sr.	Ferris State
RB	Anthony Bilal	Sr.	Lake Erie
RB	Cameron McDondle	Sr.	Colorado St.-Pueblo
WR	Keelan Cole	Jr.	Kentucky Wesleyan
WR	T.J. Smith	So.	Concord
TE	Tim Brown	Sr.	West Chester
OL	Travis Hening	Sr.	East Central (Okla.)
OL	Joe Ray	Sr.	Lenoir-Rhyne
OL	Corey Tucker	Sr.	Slippery Rock
OL	Jordan Morgan	Jr.	Kutztown
OL	Jim Walsh	Sr.	Grand Valley State
AP	Geremy Alridge-Mitchell	Sr.	West Texas A&M
K	Anthony Pistelli	Jr.	Valdosta State

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DL	Josh Gordon	Sr.	Minnesota State
DL	Marcus Martin	So.	Slippery Rock
DL	Justin Zimmer	Sr.	Ferris State
DL	Clayton Callicutt	Sr.	Angelo State
LB	Joe Rosenbrock	Jr.	Colorado St.-Pueblo
LB	Tyler Henderson	Sr.	Minnesota State
LB	Connor Harris	Jr.	Lindenwood
DB	Jordan Shaw	Sr.	Shorter (Ga.)
DB	Michael Jordan	Sr.	Missouri Western St.
DB	Solomon St. Pierre	Sr.	Sioux Falls
DB	Mike Zanders	Jr.	Gannon
P	Austin Pitchford	So.	Colorado Mesa

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Justin Dvorak	Jr.	Colorado Mines
RB	Calvinaugh Jones	Sr.	Concord
RB	Brock Jones	Sr.	Gannon
WR	Casey Osborne	Sr.	Delta State
WR	Nathan Mourik	Sr.	Southwest Baptist
TE	Cole Spurgeon	Sr.	Colorado Mines
OL	Frank Vruwink	Sr.	Michigan Tech
OL	Nate Theaker	Sr.	Wayne State
OL	Peter Bateman	Jr.	Minnesota-Duluth
OL	Cory Tucker	Sr.	Slippery Rocky
OL	Mose Countryman	Sr.	Delta State
AP	Marquise Cushon	Sr.	Pittsburg State
K	Brent Wahle	Sr.	Ohio Dominican

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DL	Justin Zimmer	Jr.	Ferris State
DL	Lucky Baar	Jr.	McKendree
DL	Darius Caldwell	Sr.	West Georgia
DL	Brandon Yost	Sr.	Northwest Missouri St.
LB	Austin Dotson	Jr.	Concord
LB	Braysean Jones	Sr.	Miles
LB	Kenny Murphy	Jr.	Valdosta State
DB	Tony Andrews	Jr.	Lake Erie
DB	Marqui Christian	Sr.	Midwestern State
DB	Jordan Bowman	Jr.	California (Pa.)
DB	Romelo Wilson	Jr.	Delta State
P	Andrew Cerett	Sr.	California (Pa.)

THE BIG ONES

SEPTEMBER 3
Minnesota Duluth at Minnesota State-Mankato
Two of the final four teams standing last season square off in the season opener for both.

OCTOBER 17
Northwest Missouri State at Pittsburg State
If Bearcats survive early part of schedule and get young starters acclimated, it sets up showdown with a fellow perennial power on the road.

OCTOBER 24
North Alabama at West Georgia
Critical Gulf South clash at home for West Georgia, which will be concluding three-game stretch that includes Valdosta State and trip to Delta State.

OCTOBER 24
Bloomsburg at West Chester
Bloomsburg's 41-10 rout last year was only blemish on West Chester's regular season. Annual tilt almost always plays big factor in PSAC picture.

OCTOBER 31
Delta State at North Alabama
Heavyweight bout between two teams loaded with all-conference performers with the GSC title likely hanging in the balance late in season.

2014 PLAYOFFS

FIRST ROUND

West Chester	46
Slippery Rock	20
Virginia State	28
LIU Post	17
Minnesota-Duluth	25
Northwest Missouri State	21
Pittsburg State	59
Harding	42
Valdosta State	33
North Alabama	31
West Georgia	20
Tuskegee	17
Ohio Dominican	34
Colorado Mines	23
Angelo State	42
Michigan Tech	41

SECOND ROUND

Concord		51
West Chester		36
Bloomsburg		35
Virginia State		14
Minnesota-Duluth		48
Ouachita Baptist	(OT)	45
Minnesota State		24
Pittsburg State	(OT)	21
Valdosta State		23
Lenoir-Rhyne		21
West Georgia		37
Delta State		27
Ohio Dominican		46
Ferris State		33
Colorado State-Pueblo		52
Angelo State		14

QUARTERFINALS

Concord	32
Bloomsburg	26
West Georgia	31
Valdosta State	17
Minnesota State	44
Minnesota-Duluth	17
Colorado State-Pueblo	31
Ohio Dominican	28

SEMIFINALS

Minnesota State	47
Concord	13
Colorado State-Pueblo	10
West Georgia	7

CHAMPIONSHIP

Colorado State-Pueblo	13
Minnesota State	0

COLORADO STATE-PUEBLO

Photo by Denny Medley-USA TODAY Sports

Most Valuable Player	Offensive Player of the Year	Defensive Player of the Year	Newcomer of the Year
Jason Vander Laan, QB, Ferris State	Anthony Bilal, RB, Lake Erie	Josh Gordon, DL, Minnesota State	John Roderique, QB, Pittsburg State

PICKING **DIVISION III**

Mount Union Stocked for Title Run

For the last six years there might not have been a more dominant football team in the country than Wisconsin-Whitewater.

For the decade before that, though, Mount Union could lay claim to that title, and this could be the year they remind everyone why that is.

The Purple Raiders, the national runners-up in 2014 and 2013, and winners of the title nine times between 1996 and 2008, are *Lindy's* preseason No. 1.

With six *Lindy's* preseason All-Americans on the roster, this could be the year the Purple Raiders make it a purple reign again. Instead of the prolific offense that has become the Mount Union trademark, it might be the defense that takes center stage.

The Purple Raiders return eight starters on defense, including 5-10 Ohio Athletic Conference Defensive Back of the Year Alex Kocheff, OAC Defensive Lineman of the Year Tom Lally, and 12 of the team's top 15 tacklers.

The key will be finding a replacement for quarterback Kevin Burke. He is the only two-time Gagliardi Trophy (the D-III Heisman Trophy) winner. He finished with 52 TDs and just nine interceptions.

It is not like Mount Union has fallen off the national radar. The Purple Raiders have reached the national semifinals for 20 straight seasons. But for a program whose expectations are national titles not playoff appearances, winning just one title in six years constitutes a drought.

The defense alone has the depth and talent to make the Raiders title contenders. Last year it was one of the best in the country. The Purple Raiders were the nation's No. 10 rated total defense (260.4 yards per game), No. 4 scoring defense (11.5 ppg), No. 12 rush defense (92.1 yards per game) No. 1 pass defense (113.1 yards per game) and No. 8 third down defense (26 percent conversion rate), tied for fifth with 22 interceptions and seventh in tackles for loss with 9.7 per game.

Chris Kappas set the bar high in his first season as defensive coordinator. He moved to the position from receivers coach. Kappas played defensive back for Mount Union and was on the 2005 and 2006 national title teams, was on the coaching staff for the 2008 national title, then spent three years as an assistant coach at Bowling Green before coming back to Mount Union in 2013.

On offense, the Raiders return their top four running backs and 3,332 of the 4,133 yards rushing last season. The Raiders also have a pair of potent receiving threats. Taurice Scott led the team in catches (82), and Roman Namdar led the team in receiving yards (1,287). Namdar (18) and Scott (12) combined for 30 touchdowns. Both are converted quarterbacks.

The entire left side of the offensive line returns as well. Mount Union's offensive line play was a big reason the Raiders were the nation's top-rated offense last season. Leading the unit is All-OAC and *Lindy's* preseason selection Michael Frank, who has played both left guard and left tackle. Junior Brooks Jenkins and senior Anthony Presutti saw time on the left side last year and at center was Mitch Doraty.

Fans hang a sign in the south end zone of Alliance Stadium that says "Welcome to the Machine," where the Raiders have won 83 straight games — and in its 101st year is the oldest college football stadium in Ohio. Last year the state of Ohio commemorated the stadium with a Historical Marker.

Wisconsin-Whitewater, ranked second in the preseason, is not far behind Mount Union with three *Lindy's* preseason All-Americans, led by defensive stalwarts Zach Franz and Justin Dischler. Rounding out the Top five are Wheaton, St. John's and Linfield.

— Dominick DiRienzo

DIVISION III **TOP 25**

1. Mount Union	Six *Lindy's* preseason All-Americans lead Purple Raiders.
2. Wisconsin-Whitewater	Title would make Warhawks first three-peater since they did it, 2009-11.
3. Wheaton	MLB Adams Dansdill (6-0, 215) averaged 11 tackles per game last year.
4. St. John's	Running back Sam Sura missed equivalent of two games, still set eight school records.
5. Linfield	Nation's leading sacker Alex Hoff returns to lead Wildcats' defense.
6. Wartburg	IIAC offensive MVP Logan Schrader and Coach of the Year Rick Willis back for 2015.
7. North Central	RB Oshayne Brown led team with 682 yards rushing in just four games as a starter.
8. Wesley	Can they find 8 starters on 'D'? Can QB Joe Callahan repeat 46 TDs, 4,190 yards?
9. Washington & Jefferson	OL Zach Crossey protects Peter Coughlin, opens holes for Ryan Ruffing.
10. Mary Hardin-Baylor	Teidrick Smith ASC Defensive Player of the Year in 2014.
11. Hardin-Simmons	Ten starters return on D, six on offense, led by Kerry Sloan ASC offensive MVP.
12. John Carroll	LB Kevin Cope and DB Michael Collins lead Blue Streaks' defense.
13. Guilford	If DB JerMario Gooch repeats 2014's six INTs, he'll match school's career record (17).
14. Texas Lutheran	Marquise Barolle rushed for 1,791 yards and 14 TDs last year.
15. St. Lawrence	Six first-team all-league players, including Offensive POY QB Mike Lefflbine.
16. Bethel	Royals hope for playoff spot; coach Steve Johnson (192-82-1) aiming for 200th win.
17. Johns Hopkins	Strong offensive line play should pave way for Blue Jays.
18. Trine	Thunder lost final two league games last year; this year's mantra is "Finish."
19. Monmouth	15 returning starters; former DC Chad Braun named new head coach.
20. St. John Fisher	Workhorse RB Tony Fusco became school's first freshman 1,000-yard runner.
21. Delaware Valley	Rashaad Lighty (8.5 sacks) and DelVal will be stout on defense.
22. St. Thomas	Alex Fenske, John Gould (both 4-1 as starters) lead race for open QB job.
23. Franklin	Second straight season looking for QB; four returning OL make transition smoother.
24. Wittenberg	WR Zach Culvahouse set a school record with 81 catches last season.
25. Cal Lutheran	After a tough 2014 for team, speedy LB Ronny Camacho ready to lead Bulldogs.

Lindy's 2015 ALL-DIV III Team

OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

QB	Logan Schrader	Sr.	Wartburg
RB	Josh Williams	Sr.	Elmhurst
RB	Sam Sura	Sr.	St. John's
WR	Matt Boyce	Sr.	Gustavus Adolphus
WR	Roman Namdar	Sr.	Mount Union
TE	Joe Sommers	Sr.	UW-Oshkosh
C	Joe Magardino	Sr.	Trinity (Conn.)
OG	Colin Egan	Sr.	Johns Hopkins
OG	Conner Peters	Sr.	UW-Whitewater
OT	Michael Frank	Sr.	Mount Union
OT	Zack Crossey	Sr.	Washington & Jefferson
RET	Dylan Peebles	Sr.	Cortland
K	Diogo Dietrich	Sr.	SUNY-Maritime

DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

DE	Alex Hoff	Sr.	Linfield
DT	Tom Lally	Sr.	Mount Union
DT	Zach Franz	Sr.	UW-Whitewater
DE	Teidrick Smith	Jr.	Mary Hardin-Baylor
LB	Justin Dischler	Sr.	UW-Whitewater
LB	Adam Dansdill	Sr.	Wheaton (Ill.)
LB	Kevin Cope	Sr.	John Carroll
CB	JerMario Gooch	Sr.	Guilford
CB	Tre Jones	Sr.	Mount Union
S	Alex Kocheff	Sr.	Mount Union
S	Eric Gargiulo	Sr.	Montclair
P	Nico Francino	Jr.	Hardin-Simmons

OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

QB	Joe Callahan	Sr.	Wesley
RB	Marquis Barolle	Jr.	Texas Lutheran
RB	Withler Marcelin	Sr.	Rowan
WR	Joey Sonnenfeld	Sr.	Augsburg
WR	Adam Smith	Sr.	Guilford
TE	Garrett Claxton	Sr.	Elmhurst
C	Alex Damschroder	Sr.	Heidelberg
OG	Elliot Tobin	Jr.	MIT
OG	Anthony Latina	Sr.	John Carroll
OT	Rowan Cade	Sr.	Johns Hopkins
OT	Matt Snebold	Sr.	Wheaton
RET	Evan Clarke	Jr.	St. John's
K	Evan Grissom	Sr.	Wittenberg

DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

DE	Aaron Karlen	Sr.	UW-Stevens Point
DT	Zach Capehart	Sr.	Maryville (Tenn.)
DT	Chyron Brown-Wallace	Sr.	St. Lawrence
DE	Steve Ambs	Sr.	Ursinus
LB	Marquis Artis	Sr.	Buffalo State
LB	Chaney Fulton	Sr.	Muskingum
LB	Hank Spencer	Sr.	Mount Union
CB	Leondre Simmon	Sr.	St. Lawrence
CB	Michael Hollins	Jr.	John Carroll
S	Sean Titus	Jr.	Widener
S	Jarrett Lecas	Jr.	Benedictine
P	Alec Stanke	Sr.	Washington

THE BIG ONES

Sept. 12 Pacific Lutheran at Cal Lutheran	Western powerhouses meet in first season-opening night game in Cal Lutheran history.
Sept. 12 Chapman at Linfield	SCIAC and NWC contenders meet in rematch of 2013 playoffs.
Sept. 26 St. Thomas at St. John's	St. John's has won the last two; definite playoff implications.
Oct. 26 Wheaton at North Central	Conference rivals will be battling for league championship.
Nov. 14 Mt. Union at John Carroll	Winner will get OAC's automatic qualifier for playoffs.

2014 PLAYOFFS

FIRST ROUND

UW-Whitewater	55
Macalester	2
Wabash	33
Franklin	14
St John's	35
St. Scholastica	7
Wartburg	37
St. Thomas	31
Widener	36
Muhlenberg	35
Christopher Newport	29
Delaware Valley	26
Linfield	55
Chapman	24
Mary Hardin-Baylor	27
Texas Lutheran	20
Wesley	52
Hampden-Sydnaey	7
MIT	27
Husson	(OT) 20
Johns Hopkins	24
Rowan	16
Hobart	22
Ithaca	15
Wheaton	43
Benedictine (Ill.)	14
John Carroll	63
Centre	28
Washington & Jefferson	41
Wittenberg	25
Mount Union	63
Adrian	3

SECOND ROUND

UW-Whitewater	38
Wabash	14
Wartburg	21
St John's	10
Widener	37
Christopher Newport	27
Linfield	31
Mary Hardin-Baylor	28
Wesley	59
MIT	0
Hobart	24
Johns Hopkins	21
John Carroll	14
Wheaton	12
Mount Union	67
Washington & Jefferson	0

QUARTERFINALS

UW-Whitewater	37
Wartburg	33
Linfield	45
Widener	7
Wesley	41
Hobart	13
Mount Union	36
John Carroll	28

SEMIFINALS

Mount Union	70
Wesley	21
UW-Whitewater	20
Linfield	14

STAGG BOWL XLII

UW-Whitewater	43
Mount Union	34

Most Valuable Player	Offensive Player of the Year	Defensive Player of the Year	Newcomer of the Year
Sam Sura RB, St. John's	Roman Namdar WR, Mount Union	Tom Lally DT, Mount Union	Spur Heea So., North Central

Mike Garrett 1965 Heisman Winner
Photo by Malcolm Emmons-USA TODAY Sports

A Look BACK

5 YEARS AGO: 2010

The year of the Tiger ... and the *Camback*. The season was a collection of Cam Newton highlights, including one of the greatest of Iron Bowls: Alabama scored touchdowns the first three times it got the ball and took an unbelievable 24-0 lead. Yet, missed scoring opportunities for the Tide left the door open a crack ... and Newton and crew burst through. Newton passed for three TDs and ran for another for the shocking 28-27 victory. The Tigers — by then clearly a special team — overcame allegations and controversy to go on to beat South Carolina in the SEC title game before rallying to beat Oregon in the BCS Championship Game.

Final AP Top 5

1. Auburn 14-0
2. TCU 13-0
3. Oregon 12-1
4. Stanford 12-1
5. Ohio State 12-1

Heisman Trophy

1. Cam Newton, QB, Auburn
2. Andrew Luck, QB, Stanford
3. LaMichael James, RB, Oregon
4. Kellen Moore, QB, Boise State
5. Justin Blackmon, WR, Oklahoma State

10 YEARS AGO: 2005

It was a season-long prelude to one of the most anticipated, star-studded, dramatic national championship games ever played. Defending national champion USC was being touted as one of the greatest teams of all time, having won 34 consecutive games and being led by 2004 Heisman Trophy winner Matt Leinart, and 2005 Heisman Trophy winner Reggie Bush. But Texas was just as undefeated, and was an even higher-scoring unit. And do-it-all quarterback Vince Young simply did it all in the 1 vs. 2 Rose Bowl. VY went for 476 yards of total offense, including scoring the game-winning touchdown with 19 seconds remaining.

Final AP Top 5

1. Texas 13-0
2. USC 12-1
3. Penn State 11-1
4. Ohio State 10-2
5. West Virginia 11-1

Heisman Trophy

1. Reggie Bush, RB, USC
2. Vince Young, QB, Texas
3. Matt Leinart, QB, USC
4. Brady Quinn, QB, Notre Dame
5. Michael Robinson, QB, Penn State

15 YEARS AGO: 2000

It might not be so easy to recall now how far Oklahoma had fallen in the 1990s. The Sooners had been through three head coaches and had gone five years without a winning record, until Florida defensive coordinator Bob Stoops arrived to right the program. The first year, they went to a bowl, and the second year was this stunning national championship, with one of the most dominant defenses ever. The Sooners were 10-point underdogs to defending national champion Florida State, but OU smothered Heisman Trophy winner Chris Weinke and the Seminoles in the Orange Bowl, winning 13-2 to take home the seventh championship in school history.

Final AP Top 5

1. Oklahoma 13-0
2. Miami 11-1
3. Washington 11-1
4. Oregon State 11-1
5. Florida State 11-2

Heisman Trophy

1. Chris Weinke, QB, Florida State
2. Josh Heupel, QB, Oklahoma
3. Drew Brees, QB, Purdue
4. LaDainian Tomlinson, RB, TCU
5. Damien Anderson, RB, Northwestern

20 YEARS AGO: 1995

One of the most dominant teams in college football history, the '95 Nebraska Cornhuskers showed their overwhelming power in the Fiesta Bowl. The previous year, the Cornhuskers went undefeated and captured the national championship, and they carried a 24-game winning streak into this title game, yet they were ranked second to Florida. But after Tommie Frazier, Lawrence Phillips and the Blackshirts had their way with the Gators, the 62-24 rout left no doubt in anyone's mind about Tom Osborne's epic team. These guys beat four teams ranked in the top 10 by an average of 49-14. Florida would bounce back a year later.

Final AP Top 5

1. Nebraska 12-0
2. Florida 12-1
3. Tennessee 11-1
4. Florida State 10-2
5. Colorado 10-2

Heisman Trophy

1. Eddie George, RB, Ohio State
2. Tommie Frazier, QB, Nebraska
3. Danny Wuerffel, QB, Florida
4. Darnell Autry, RB, Northwestern
5. Troy Davis, RB, Iowa State

25 YEARS AGO: 1990

This was a topsy-turvy season in which five different teams were No. 1. How weird did it get? Well, Colorado lost one game, tied another, and then would have lost another if the game officials hadn't given the Buffs and extra down at the Missouri goal line (yes, the infamous fifth-down game). Yet they still captured (a share) of the national championship. Even their bowl game was controversial when Notre Dame's Rocket Ismail took a punt back 91 yards late in the game, but a questionable clipping penalty called it back in a 10-9 CU triumph. The AP poll put the Buffs on top, but the coaches couldn't bring themselves to do that, instead vaulting 11-0-1 Georgia Tech to a share of the title after Bobby Ross's team beat 19th-ranked Nebraska in the Citrus Bowl.

Final AP Top 5

1. Colorado 11-1-1
2. Georgia Tech 11-0-1
3. Miami 10-2
4. Florida State 10-2
5. Washington 10-2

Heisman Trophy

1. Ty Detmer, QB, BYU
2. Raghib Ismail, WR-KR, Notre Dame
3. Eric Bieniemy, RB, Colorado
4. Shawn Moore, QB, Virginia
5. David Klingler, QB, Houston

50 YEARS AGO: 1965

This was the season the AP (media) poll took the first step toward a national championship game. Before 1965, national championships were so unofficial they didn't even include results of bowl games. And the bowls showed that they were worth the wait when No. 1 Michigan State, No. 2 Arkansas and No. 3 Nebraska all went into New Year's Day undefeated ... and lost. UCLA upset MSU in the Rose, and LSU knocked off Arkansas in the Cotton Bowls, leaving the evening's Orange Bowl to crown No. 3 Nebraska or No. 4 Alabama as national champion. Bear Bryant used all of his wiles to upend Bob Devaney's powerful squad, as the Tide converted two onside kicks in a 39-28 triumph (its third title in five years). This still went down as a split national title, with Michigan State No. 1 in the coaches poll, since United Press International awarded its trophy before the bowl games.

Final AP Top 5

1. Alabama 9-1-1
2. Michigan State 10-1
3. Arkansas 10-1
4. UCLA 8-2-1
5. Nebraska 10-1

Heisman Trophy

1. Mike Garrett, RB, Southern California
2. Howard Twilley, WR, Tulsa
3. Jim Grabowski, RB, Illinois
4. Donny Anderson, RB, Texas Tech
5. Floyd Little, RB, Syracuse

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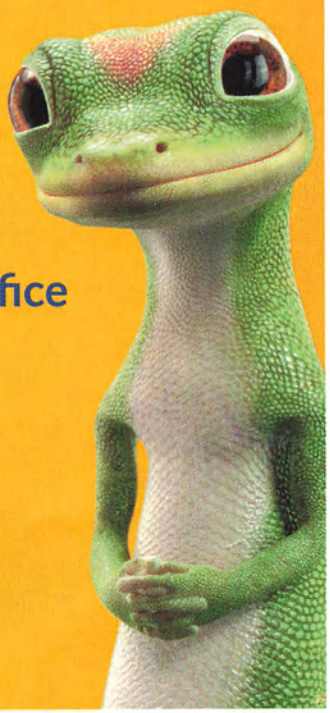

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